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verdicts

- OUTSTANDING
- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- MEDIOCRE
- POOR
- £ VALUE

simply the best
extremely capable
worth auditioning
unremarkable
seriously flawed
keenly priced



Doesn't the Luxman L-505u amplifier featured on our front cover have a certain charm? Just look at those illuminated blue power meters – see page 12. They are pure hi-fi bling! And there's a little story behind what you see. Luxman Corporation of Japan bounced between various owners – check out Luxman on Wikipedia – until recently, when it was acquired by International Audio Group of China. I saw Lux products being assembled by IAG in Shenzhen, China, overseen by UK engineers who have introduced higher internal build standards and rigorous quality control. Luxman today is still a Japanese designed product, but now built in China to exacting standards. Having bought and enjoyed Lux products in the past, I hope their loveliness continues!

Question: what's the connection between Lux of Japan and Leak of England, other than they both start with a L? Surprisingly, many. The Leak Troughline tuner featured in this issue – see p27 – hails from the days of valves, and that is where Luxman started, producing valve amplifiers. Both brands are now owned by International Audio Group. And Tim de Paravicini of EAR Yoshino designed Lux valve amps in the 1960s then our own Leak Troughline valve stereo decoder in the early 1990s.

Sansui is another respected Japanese brand that fell on hard times but is back doing what it was famous for: producing good quality budget hi-fi. For its low price of around £350 the VLD+201L music streamer offers a mountain of ability - see p55.

I can't quite believe how Sony can build and sell something as complex as their new STR-DNI030 AV receiver for £470. It packs in vast amounts of modern ability to support home cinema, and nearly every conceivable form of audio streaming too. See p46 where Martin Pipe ably delves into its complexities.

Talking of which, I apologise for deciding to move over both NAD M51 DAC and Chord Index reviews to next month. Both are complex products and probing their abilities with our advanced Rohde & Schwarz UPV analyser isn't something to be rushed. Both offer fascinating glimpses into high fidelity of tomorrow and we will provide unmatched reviews of them next month.

Noel Keywood, Editor

testing (see www.hi-fiworld.co.uk for full explanations of all our tests)

To ensure the upmost accuracy in our product reviews, *Hi-Fi World* has extremely comprehensive in-house test facilities, and our test equipment - from big names like Rohde & Schwarz and Hewlett Packard - is amongst the most advanced in the world.

Loudspeakers are measured using a calibrated Bruel & Kjaer microphone feeding a Clio-based computer

analyser, using pulsed and gated sinewaves, in a large room to eliminate the room's influence. Pickup arm vibration is measured with a Bruel & Kjaer accelerometer.

No other UK hi-fi magazine has in-house testing, and none has access to such advanced tests across all types of equipment. That's why you can depend on *Hi-Fi World* reviews.

ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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96

SRM Athena turntable



12

Luxman L-505u integrated amplifier

46

Sony STR-DN1030 AV receiver



55

Sansui WLD+201L network player



90

Creek WyndSOR phono stage



16

Spendor A3 compact floorstanding loudspeakers

LOUDSPEAKERS EPOS ELAN 35 58

Super sensitive floorstanders that run deep, enjoyed by Jon Myles

SPENDOR A3 16

Compact floorstanders with the smooth Spondor sound, Jon Myles finds.

TRACK SPEAKER STANDS 81

Paul Rigby checks out some fine loudspeaker stands

DIGITAL SANSUI WLD+201L MEDIA STREAMER 55

Another affordable media streamer is auditioned by Paul Rigby

SONY STR-DNI030 AV RECEIVER 46

Martin Pipe grapples with a complex but affordable AV receiver.

AMPLIFICATION LUXMAN L-505U AMPLIFIER 12

Tony Bolton lives with a big, classic Luxman amplifier

DENSEN B-175 AMPLIFIER 50

Paul Rigby reviews a powerful Danish beauty.

VTL IT-85 VALVE AMPLIFIER 20

This is a nicely crafted valve amplifier, says Paul Rigby.

FEATURES LEAK TROUGHLINE II UPGRADE PART II 27

Neville Roberts rounds off his feature on the Leak Troughline tuner.

MODERN RECORDING TECHNIQUES PART II 66

Rafael Todes talks to record producer Tony Faulkner.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE 108

Noel Keywood explains our rigid testing regime.

VINTAGE VALUES TOSHIBA SR370 TURNTABLE 70

Haden Boardman uncovers a forgotten turntable...

SYSTEMS SONOS STREAMING PLAYERS 60

Paul Rigby listens to music over wi-fi with these low cost players.

VINYL SECTION NEWS 82

All the latest and greatest vinyl releases for you, from Paul Rigby.

INSPIRE QUEST CLEAR TURNTABLE 84

Tony Bolton checks out an interesting Rega upgrade path.

CREEK WYNDSOR PHONO STAGE 90

Creek's top phono stage catches Tony Bolton's ear.

SRM ATHENA TURNTABLE AND EL-1 TONEARM 96

Tony Bolton reviews a new SRM turntable with tweaked Rega arm.

CLEAR AUDIO DA VINCI CARTRIDGE 93

A bank breaking moving coil cartridge, auditioned by Tony Bolton.



7 NEWS

Words from the front...

25 COMPETITION

Your chance to win a pair of XTZ 99.26 Mk.2 loudspeakers in this month's competition.

32 MAIL

Nine pages of your views; no small amount of controversy here...

64 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Ensure your copy every month and save money too!

68 AUDIOPHILE CD

Paul Rigby rounds up the latest audiophile CD releases.

75, 77, 79, OPINION

The team get to grips with matters music, hi-fi and life!

106 DIAL-A-DEALER

A comprehensive guide to UK hi-fi retailers

110 CLASSIFIEDS

Two pages of second-hand bargains

112 NEXT MONTH

what we hope to bring you in the next sizzling issue...

113 ADVERTISERS' INDEX

114 CLASSIC CUTS

Paul Rigby on Roxy Music: The Complete Studio Recordings, 1972-1982.

SOUNDBITES

73 TELLURIUM Q USB CABLE/FISULA SPEAKER CABLES

Paul Rigby checks out some stunning new cables.

89 OYAIDE STB-MS TURNTABLE WEIGHT/ ILFORD ANTISTATIC CLOTH

Paul Rigby looks at interesting turntable accessories.

CABLES

19 CLARUS CABLES

The Clarus Aqua cable is complex but revealing, says Tony Bolton

101 VERMOUTH CABLES

Paul Rigby auditions cables from Jakarta, Indonesia, no less.

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QUAD'S CLASSICS

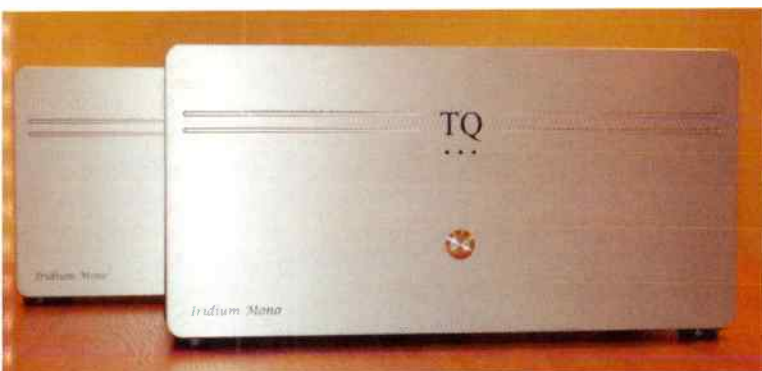
Quad has announced the 23L Classic and 25L Classic loudspeakers, both using down-firing auxiliary bass radiator (ABR) technology to extend low bass response.

The 23L is a 3-way design, housing the Classic L range's 25mm fabric dome tweeter. A 125mm woven Kevlar cone handles midrange duties and an identically sized driver looks after mid/bass operations. The 25L uses the same tweeter but incorporates a brace of 125mm drivers to deliver midrange, as well as a pair of 165mm bass drivers.

Two different wood materials are used for the cabinets, reducing resonance. Quad laminates together high density chipboard and fibreboard in a structure that breaks up the resonant modes into multiple mini-modal frequency bands.

Available in four finishes overall, non-lacquered cherry or piano black provide the price entry point for both models, while lacquered versions come in cherry or piano black.

Prices start at £1299.95 for the 23L and £1749.95 for the 25L. Call 01480 447700 or click on www.quad-hifi.co.uk for more information.



TELLURIUM TRIO

Tellurium Q is powering ahead with a range of new amplifiers.

The Iridium Mono monoblock amplifiers (£9600 for the pair) offer twin Single Ended Class A (SECA) power running phono and balanced outputs. Offering 45W per monoblock into 8 Ohms, they are designed to run on lower internal voltage but with a higher current to drive more difficult loads. Unlike the original Iridium which has power emerging from the amplifier section, through the speaker and then to ground, the new monoblocks avoids the signal to ground element, lowering distortion.

The Listen headphone amplifier (£1,236) is also a SECA, offering two, full size headphone outputs, a volume control and an internal power supply with four regulated power supplies. With a removable power cable option, it measures 165x57x166mm and weighs 1.3kg and offers three pairs of RCA outputs plus a MP3 input. The box also provides a 'pre' option for a CD player, for example.

Finally, the Atom power amplifier (£1,194) is a 40W, Class A amplifier which, "slides a little bit into B", according to the company. Aimed at those who want an Iridium SECA power amplifier (£4,800) but cannot afford one, the Atom offers speaker binding posts, two inputs plus a power switch. You also have the ability to bi- and tri-amp. Also spanning 165x57x166mm, it weighs 1.4kg. The output transistors feature 32A devices (even though 5A only was required), offering a lower base-emitter resistance junction for quieter and more stable use. Contact 01458 251997 or click on www.telluriumq.com for more information.



GIVE US A TWIRL

Black Rhodium has announced the forthcoming release of its Twirl speaker cable. Offering a much larger conductor and hence much lower impedance than the popular Twist speaker cable, it also has a thicker insulation resulting in lower 'Transient Phase Distortion'.

Twirl is suitable for long cable runs and is twisted along its length, preventing the cable acting as a 'loop aerial' for airborne radio frequency interference, while the positive and negative cores are connected in opposite directions lowering noise.

Un-terminated, the cable costs £13.50 per metre while a 3m pair terminated with 4mm plugs will cost £131. Ring 01332 342233 or click on www.blackrhodium.co.uk for more information.

BOSTON M SERIES

Boston Acoustics has introduced the M Series loudspeakers, comprising two 3-way floorstanding speakers: the flagship M350, with four 13.3cm woofers and a 11.4cm midrange (£2199.90); the slightly smaller M340 with four 11.4cm woofers (£1699.90) and a 2-way bookshelf model M25, with one 13.3cm woofer (£579.90).

The four woofer construction makes it possible to keep the cabinet slim, all M Series models utilise the Extended Wide Bandwidth (EWB) tweeter in its second generation and Boston Acoustics Lo-Q cabinet construction for minimal interference.

All are available in gloss black lacquer and traditional walnut veneer, both with black faux leather trim. Click on www.bostona.co.uk/en for more information.



ONKYO'S EXTRA STREAMING OPTIONS

Onkyo has added streaming capabilities to its remote control apps for the iPhone and Android/

Kindle platforms and introduced an aptX USB Bluetooth adaptor for a hardware option.

The upgraded Onkyo Remote 2 App for iPod and iPhone allows users to stream music stored on iPod, iTunes or iPhone directly to Onkyo's 2012 model networked receivers, through a wireless home network. The improved Onkyo Remote App for Android now also supports streaming music directly from the Kindle Fire.

High-performance lossless file formats are supported, including Apple Lossless and full metadata (including album artwork) transfer. The apps will also now have the ability to control remote zone functions and support music playback in these zones.

The UBT-1 Bluetooth USB Adapter (£50) allows Bluetooth-enabled wireless phones, tablets and other devices to stream music direct to Onkyo's 2012 network receivers configured with CSR's aptX compression reduction codec to enhance compressed files. The improved Remote Control Apps are free. Contact www.uk.onkyo.com for more information.



IQUA BEAT

The Iqua Beat provides a pair of earphones but also offers a wireless headset built for the iPhone to track heart rate, pace, calorie consumption and distance straight to the free Iqua Beat app.

The earpieces monitor heart rate from the earlobe. Workout statistics are presented in real-time on the app and are recorded after the workout has finished for review and sharing on Facebook. The Iqua Beat retails at £99. Click www.dadaudio.co.uk for more information.



DENON MICRO & COCOON

Denon has launched the upgraded D-M39DAB micro system that now features an optical digital input to attach Apple AirPort express powered products, TV or set-top boxes and a digitally transmitted play function for iPhone/iPod/iPad via the front USB terminal.

Measuring 210mm wide and 310mm you can buy the RCD-M39 CD receiver for £360 (a 2-way speaker system with



receiver for £250 or with the SC-M39 speakers (120mm woofer and 25mm soft dome tweeter). It's

available in black or silver with black speakers, a timer and a newly developed remote handset.

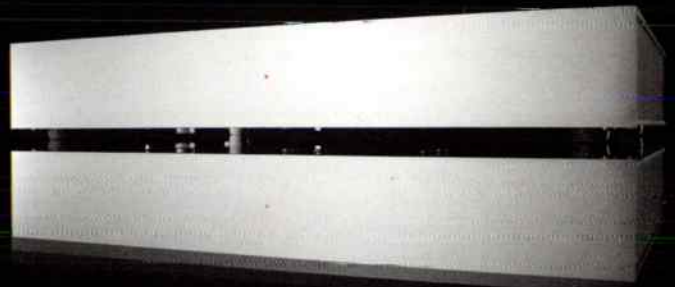
Also look out for the Cocoon Home and battery-powered Cocoon Portable (£499 each) docks with built-in speakers. Supporting Windows, iOS, Android and AirPlay, each provides a two-way speaker system, a large acoustic chamber, Denon Dual Layer Cones, bass ports and four 25W Class D amplifiers. With the ability to connect to your home network, the Cocoons can play music present on your computer or NAS drive. Call 02890 279830 or click on www.denon.co.uk for more information

DENSEN OXYGEN

Densen has announced the forthcoming launch of a new, high-end, streamer: the Oxygen 40, based on a Linux operating system (with a SD slot-based updates system). Offering a fast (five to ten second) start-up from cold, the Oxygen 40 can be controlled by a smartphone or tablet or, indeed, any other device that can access the built-in HDMI slot, including a TV.

Supporting Apple Airplay and XBMC Remote (to 24/192) along with other music services such as internet radio and Spotify, the device will also handle FLAC, FLAC 24/192, AAC, Apple Lossless, MP3, WMA, WMA Lossless, OGG and WAV.

Including USB and network ports and a 24/192, upgradable, DAC (the supplied DAC has been sourced from the respected Densen B-440XS CD player), the price of the Oxygen 40 will be £4,000. Call 02477 220650 or click on www.kogaudio.com for more information.



GENESIS

It's been a long time coming but IsoTek has finally released the first dual-cell mains generation device, which threatens to take the whole idea of power conditioning to, well, crazy high levels of performance. Priced at £12,995, it provides the power conditioning for front-end devices and then works in tandem with the now established Super Titan (£6,000) that handles the amplification.

The world's first dual-cell mains sine wave generator for audio and AV systems, the Genesis eliminates both Common Mode and Differential Mode mains noise, exceeding 80dB of noise elimination down to 3.5kHz and 60dB down to DC (0Hz) while reducing THD in the mains supply to between 0.05% and 0.17% with typical loads. The intrinsic noise floor extends down to -120dB from 20kHz into the MHz frequency range while voltage is stabilised to 230V +/- 2%. Call 01276 501392 or click on www.isoteksystems.com for more information.



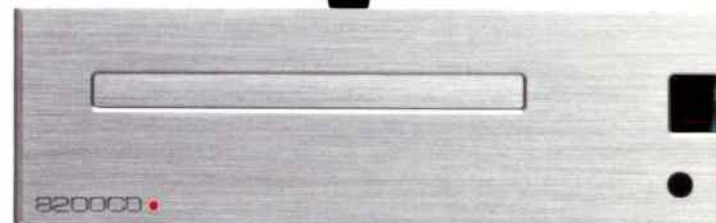
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Audiolab M-DAC Digital Preamp/DAC



Audiolab 8200CD CD Player/DAC



Audiolab 8200CDQ CD Player/Preamp/DAC



Audiolab 8200A Integrated Stereo Amplifier



Audiolab 8200MB Monoblock Power Amplifier



Audiolab 8200AP AV Preamp/Processor



Audiolab 8200T DAB/DAB+/FM Tuner



TIVOLI 5

Tivoli has announced five new products for your delectation.

The Tivoli Audio Model One BT (£199) is the company's debut table radio. It includes Bluetooth, offers FM/AM and internet radio from Tivoli Audio's own Radio App, wirelessly streamed from your phone, computer, MP3 player or other Bluetooth-enabled device. Sized at 1143x2127x1334mm, the Model One BT can link to eight paired devices. It comes in eight finishes in furniture-grade wood veneer cabinets: Walnut/Beige, Cherry/Silver, Cherry/Cobalt, Maple/Hunter, Wenge/Bronze, Black Ash/Silver, Black Ash/Black-Silver and White/Silver.

The Tivoli Audio PAL (£239) is a portable FM/AM/ internet radio with similar Bluetooth capabilities, a rechargeable battery and a weather resistant casing plus wireless streaming, it measures 1588x937x986mm and weighs less than one kilogram.

Tivoli's Audio BluCon (£99) is a receiver offering wireless and an auxiliary input. By connecting the BluCon to an audio component with an auxiliary input, music is transmitted wirelessly from Bluetooth wireless technology-enabled devices. It supports all Apple, Android, and Blackberry smartphones.

The Radio Silenz (£119) headphones offer a wooden finish with active noise cancelling. The solid wood ear cups with 40mm drivers sit within a closed back, padded on-ear design which rotate 90 degrees and upward for transport in an included travel pouch. The headphones operate for up to 50 hours on a single AAA battery and can be used with the noise cancellation on or off or even without a battery. It features a gold-plated 3.5mm right angle stereo plug, airline adapter and compact control unit with a pocket clip. Radio Silenz is available in three wood: Walnut, Cherry and Black Ash.

Finally, the Radio App, a free download from the App Store and Google Play delivers a Tivoli Audio handpicked selection of 100 global radio channels, including the likes of BBC Radio 6 Music, Dylan Radio and KGO 810 San Francisco. Each genre has ten pre-set,

pre-selected Internet radio stations from around the world. Phone **0800 047048** or click on www.tivoliaudio.co.uk for more information.



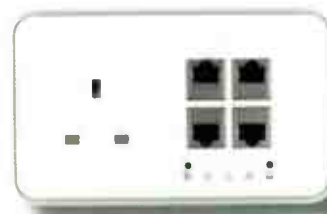
A BIT OF HUSH!

From RJC Audio, the Hush Isolation Platform is designed to support turntables and other vibration-sensitive equipment. Designed and constructed with the sole purpose of isolating the supported load from the effects of footfall and other extraneous vibration, the Hush Isolation Platforms are available in various models, suitable for non-suspended turntables and other equipment from 6kg to 17kg. For equipment greater than 18kg, RJC Audio is in the process of developing custom Hush Isolation Platforms.

The standard platform size is 515x415mmx100mm, weighing in at 8kg, acoustically shielded and damped and features a valchromat with a damping layer within an American oak frame plus three adjustable European oak feet, a birch plywood base and acrylic lacquer finish. Priced between £455 and £525. Custom units are priced on application. Contact info@rjcaudio.co.uk or click on www.rjcaudio.co.uk for more information.

IN THE SOCKET

Power Ethernet Sockets, from British start-up Power Ethernet, offer a high-speed home network built into electrical sockets. The first socket product to integrate powerline communications technology, you can build a home network capable of coping with the demands of Connected TV services, online gaming and audio and video streaming. Priced at £111 or £193 for 2 sockets and available from www.broadbandbuyer.co.uk





Yesterday today

Although it looks a little retro, the Lux L-505u is a modern design that delivers great results, finds Tony Bolton.

Way back in the '70s and '80s Luxman had an enviable reputation for building top quality audio equipment. In the intervening decades they have had mixed fortunes but in recent years seem to have returned to their position as purveyors of high-end hi-fi. This is apparent from the moment that you lift the 21kg mass of the L-505u integrated amplifier out of the box. It displays that unmistakable feel of something that has been put together with both care and good quality materials.

Aesthetically it harks back to the 1980s with a square edged solidity, and large power meters taking pride of place in the brushed alloy fascia.

These are accompanied by the usual volume and source selection knobs and several controls that are rarely found on expensive equipment in this day and age. I cannot remember the last time that I saw a high-end amplifier with treble and bass controls, and these are complemented by a 'speakers A and B switch and a Mode switch that offers stereo, mono and the ability to reproduce either the left or right channel through both speakers. There is also a subsonic filter, a headphones socket and the ability to separate the pre and power sections of this amplifier. A 'Line Straight' button bypasses the balance and tone controls to give greater purity of sound.

The back has a collection of gold plated phono sockets for the four

line level inputs, a phono input for the onboard MM and MC compatible phono stage, two tape loops and a pair of XLR inputs that come complete with a phase inversion switch that provides for both wiring options of pins 2 and 3 on the sockets.

Although the appearance may seem a little retro the internal electronics are anything but, incorporating the Company's own ODNF feedback circuit, the attenuator volume control from the flagship C-1000f pre-amplifier, and the latest (model 2.2) version of the power amplifier. Internal wiring is with Oxygen Free Copper and the fibreglass circuit boards are custom made.

This is housed in casework that

measures 467 x 179 x 437mm (w x h x d) and is available in either the silver finish of this unit or a limited edition champagne colour. The metal remote control unit comes in matching colours and continues the retro styling theme by being a reasonably heavy rectangular lump. No ergonomically shaped plastic here. Despite the uncompromising shape it proved comfortable in my hand with well laid out controls. My only complaint would be the overly responsive volume buttons which seemed to work best by being tapped gently with my finger tips. A quick press of the buttons would usually result in the volume rising or falling too far, too quickly. It also possesses a button to switch off the lights behind the power meters. Although the difference was very small I felt that the sound gained a little extra layer of air in it with the display turned off.

I installed the Luxman in the downstairs system and started feeding it with music from the Clearaudio Master Solution. The MC input of the onboard phono stage is preset to 0.3mV and 100 Ohm impedance so was perfectly suited to the Benz Micro Wood SL cartridge that currently lives on the Clearaudio.

I started off listening with the rather unusual combination of jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis performing trumpet concertos by Hummel, Haydn and L. Mozart. This recording won the Grand Prix de L'Academie Du Disque Francais and a Grammy in 1983 and showcases a 22 year old Marsalis on excellent form. Although an '80s recording, and unfortunately being digitally recorded and mastered, the musical content is excellent and the Luxman reproduced it in a very competent manner. The orchestra was displayed over a wide and well lit soundstage, with Marsalis seeming to be placed dead centre and slightly forward. I am used to hearing this with a little more depth to the staging, but this amplifier seemed to focus on bringing the performers forward into the room, rather than having them spread away from me towards the wall.

The tonal balance seemed pretty good, with a deft touch to the lower registers which gave the opening Allegro in Haydn's 'Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra in E-flat Major' a lilting step that instantly got my feet tapping along with it. The rendition of the trumpet was good, avoiding the potential for harshness, but still leaving me in no doubt that I was listening to a brass instrument.

Curious to see how this phono stage compared with their

free standing unit, I plugged in the Luxman E200 that is my current reference on the upstairs system, and replayed the recording. There was a noticeable improvement in definition and shape to the sound, but considering that I was comparing a £1500 phono stage with one that is bundled into an integrated amplifier I felt the integrated unit gave a very good account of itself. I would expect this level of performance from a separate £500 unit, so I consider that it offers good value as part of a £3295 amplifier.

Staying with jazz trumpeters, the next record was a 1959 Columbia recording of the Ken Colyer Jazzmen. The British trad jazz revival was started by Chris Barber in 1948 and Colyer joined in the following year. He was something of a purist, wanting to only play in the New Orleans style, and this led to him having several disagreements with both other musicians and studio engineers that resulted in him leaving one of his bands on the brink of major success. This recording was a new collaboration with Columbia Records (following a falling out with Decca) and found him flexing his

Colyer's trumpet to blare. Rhythms were tight and quite energetic, with Ron Ward's bass seeming to have a solid foundation beneath it. Having said that I felt that my Leema Tucana II amplifier carried extra weight in this area, with the same energy levels, but the Luxman sound was still very acceptable and enjoyable. I was also impressed with the way that the phono stage seemed to be able to reproduce the ambience of the recording studio, further confirming my estimate of its capabilities.

I was curious to see how the amplifier unit compared with the resident Tucana II, so I reconnected the Magnify arm to my Leema Agena phono stage and ran the latter using balanced interconnects into the L-505u. I played the Ken Colyer LP again and it confirmed my thoughts that the Tucana II seemed to have more energy at the lower frequency extremes. Using the same volume setting I felt that the bass notes had a bit more slam and weight to



artistic muscles to good effect. His recording of Louis Armstrong's track 'Papadip' was a case in point. Colyer had a slightly muscular style of playing that could produce a somewhat hard tone from his trumpet. The Luxman rose to the challenge, reproducing it honestly, although I felt that on a couple of occasions that it strayed a little close to the line that separates hardness from harshness.

I appreciated the mono switch. Activating it removed the occasional bit of surface noise on an otherwise good condition record, and eliminated any tendency for

them with the Leema Acoustics unit, which suited my tonal preferences, but might seem a little too heavy for some other listeners. They would find the slightly more restrained performance of the Luxman preferable. I think it comes down to how much you like the floor to move underneath your feet while you listen.

The Luxman arrived just as the Olympics were starting so it was on AV duties quite a lot. I found myself listening to the differing sound of the different venues, and such was the level of background information being transmitted that after a couple of

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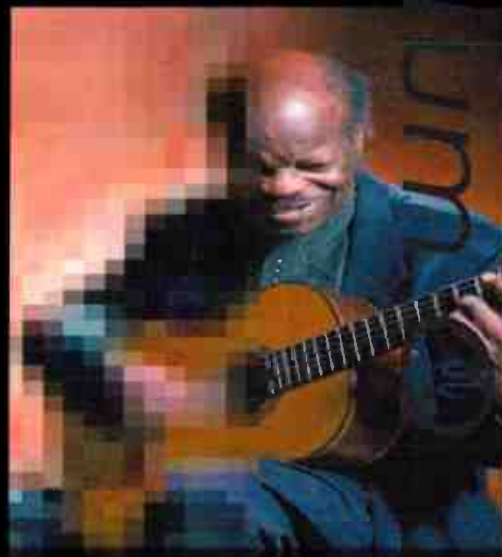
Kai Ekholm, Inner-magazines.com 2012

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Steve Dickenson, Hi Fi Plus 2010

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days I was able to tell just from the sound where the action was taking place. I am not a sporty person but found myself getting more involved in the proceedings when listening through this system, whereas listening in other spaces, including a friend's house which is equipped for 5.1 surround sound, I found I was less emotionally involved. I can only put this down to some of the subtleties of the Luxman's output, where it seemed to somehow identify and transmit the humanity, emotional excitement and intensity behind the sounds that it was reproducing. It was an almost subliminal thing. There was none of the slightly cloying sweetness that some amps use to create an emotionally charged atmosphere, in fact almost the opposite, but it seemed to produce a sound that connected with my emotions in the same way that the Tucana II does.

I next played more dance-influenced sounds with the CD 'Heroes Of The Imagination', a compilation of tracks and artists from the Tip World stable. This is mostly uptempo trance and the L-505u got into the groove, producing an enticing and energetic sound that suited the genre well. I did slightly miss the Tucana II's fuller bass but I enjoyed the deftness of the Luxman's presentation. The openness of the sound allowed me to analyse the mix while at the same time presenting it as a cohesive and comprehensive whole.

Cohesive and comprehensive are good words to sum up the Luxman L-505u's performance. It presented sounds in a calm and authoritative way while retaining impeccable

manners, even when faced with some of the stranger sonic balances that can periodically accompany live transmissions. Fed with well recorded studio fare it seemed

to offer a winning combination of definition, good timing, secure and precise imaging and an ability to subtly present emotions in a digestible and moving way.

It is well equipped with a host a facilities that make it an excellent package for someone wanting a one box solution to their musical needs. The phonostage is no slouch and there is also a headphone amp. That pairing would set a purchaser back around £1000 to achieve the same performance level with separate components. If you factor in the cost of decent interconnects on top and the fact that there is a muscular power amp, and a well designed pre-amp thrown in, then £3295 begins to look like a reasonable amount of money for the performance and build quality offered. Beyond the fact that my sonic taste buds like a little more bottom end slam than the Luxman seemed to deliver, I really do find this amp very difficult to fault.

The high-end DNA, passed down from previous generations of amplifier were obvious in this unit, and it can be regarded as a fine

example of the top quality type of component that built the Luxman reputation some 30 odd years ago. I have enjoyed my time with this amp and am absolutely sure that it will provide great pleasure and satisfaction to any future owner.

SYSTEM USED:

Clearaudio Master Solution turntable/ Magnify arm/ Benz Micro Wood SL cartridge. Luxman E200 phonostage. Leema Acoustics Tucana II amplifier/ Antilla 2S Eco CD player/ Agena phonostage. Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers

MUSIC USED:

Haydn/ Hummel/ L. Mozart 'Trumpet Concertos'. Wynton Marsalis. National Philharmonic Orchestra conducted Raymond Leppard. CBS Records. D 37846. 1983.

Ken Colyer's Jazzmen. 'This Is Jazz'. Columbia Records. 33 SX 1220. 1959.

Heroes Of The Imagination. '1200 Micrograms'. Tip World Records. TIPWCD 30. 2003.

VERDICT ●●●●●
Superbly built and excellent sounding amplifier from Japanese high-end manufacturer.

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Select Audio
☎ +44 (0)1900 813064
www.selectaudio.co.uk

- FOR**
- open and detailed sound
 - onboard MM and MC phonostage
 - smooth well-mannered presentation
- AGAINST**
- overly responsive volume control on remote
 - some may want extra bottom end weight

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Lux L-505u produced 112 Watts into an 8 Ohm load and 182 Watts into a 4 Ohm load, so there's plenty in reserve for unstrained high volume with any loudspeaker. A damping factor of 44 shows the amplifier has a low output impedance and will keep a grip on loudspeaker bass cones.

Distortion levels were very low all round, measuring a meagre 0.006% at 10kHz, 1 Watt output. The distortion residual comprised second and third harmonics only, our analysis shows, with no higher harmonics and this was not crossover distortion our time domain analysis showed. With little change in harmonic content the L-505u should have clean, stable treble. Surprisingly, frequency response was not too extended, reaching 36kHz (-1dB) and extending down to 1Hz, suggesting use of all direct coupling and a d.c. servo. The XLR inputs have the same sensitivity as the phono inputs.

The phono stage was very accurately equalised, right down to 2Hz with MM, but there is no warp filter so full gain exists below 20Hz and warps will produce cone flap. There is a 'subsonic' button on the front panel but this cuts bass heavily. MC equalisation was a little different to MM; there was some low bass roll off and a bit more upper bass / lower midband, so MC will give a fuller sound balance.

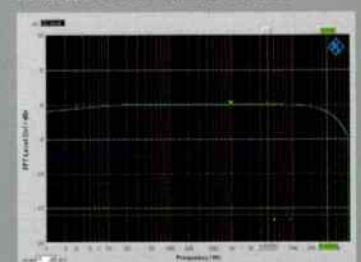
Hiss was low on both inputs and sensitivity high on MC, so low output MC cartridges can be used.

The L-505u has plenty of power and a very even distortion pattern with no crossover artefacts. It runs warm so likely runs substantially in Class A and

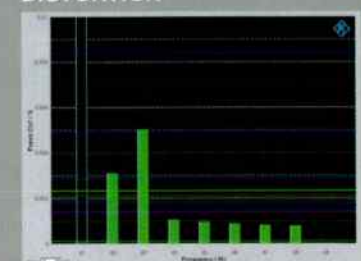
this is one reason it measures so well. NK

Power	112watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1Hz-36kHz
Separation	81dB
Noise	-97dB
Distortion	0.004%
Sensitivity (phono & XLR)	180mV
Disc	
Frequency response	2Hz-20kHz
Separation	72dB
Noise (MM/MC)	0.12µV / 0.016µV
Distortion	0.006%
Sensitivity	3mV / 0.2mV
Overload	120mV / 14mV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION





Spendor says its diminutive A3 floorstander is designed to give big sound from a small box. But can it deliver the goods? Jon Myles finds out.

Big Spendor

Fans of the bigger-is-better school of loudspeaker design are unlikely to give the Spendor A3s a second glance in their local showroom. These compact speakers are the smallest in the company's extensive range of floorstanders, clocking in at 76cm tall and 16.5cm wide.

Spendor say the A3s are

engineered to produce a big sound from a compact enclosure that won't intrude into the average UK living room.

Finished in a range of real wood veneers including Black Ash, Walnut, Light Oak and Cherry they are a rear-ported design and feature a single pair of high quality WBT speaker terminals set fairly high at the back. This presumably minimises

interior connections but can leave speaker wiring looking messy. The WBTs accept bare cables, 4mm plugs and spade terminals.

Drive units are a 150mm Spendor-specified ep38 polymer cone mid/bass unit, allied to a 22mm wide-surround tweeter that looks and measures much like a Vifa ring-dome – and this is a good thing! Vifa ring domes measure flat and sound



smooth.

Sendor specifies an impedance of 8ohms with a 6.2ohm minimum, 86dB sensitivity and maximum power handling of 125 Watts. The cabinet is sturdily constructed and a rigid base plate contains metal fixings for the spikes so they won't tear out.

All-in-all the A3 is an elegant, well-made package. But can it deliver the goods at a price of £1,295, a level at which it is up against some serious competition from KEF, Epos and many others?

SOUND QUALITY

First impressions were undeniably good; I hooked them up to a Naim Uniti and they really sang. With Bruce Springsteen's Wrecking Ball collection the A3s handled the mix of guitar-driven rock, Irish-tinged anthems, folk and gospel with aplomb. Timing was spot-on and the relatively high 4.2kHz crossover means the drive units combine seamlessly to give a precise soundstage rich with mid-level detail. The sound really did belie their pint-sized proportions. I could easily have believed I was listening to something substantially bigger.

Voices were particularly well defined, evidenced by the admirably clear handling of speech radio, an

area where lesser speakers often fall short. Only a slight boxiness on male voices let me know that the rear-venting port is doing its thing, but it's not so noticeable as to be off-putting.

Okay, turn volume up to unsociably high levels and the sound starts to congeal, but at the levels within the spaces these Sendors will be used this is rarely going to be a problem.

Playing Arvo Part's 'Spiegel im Spiegel' highlighted another of the A3's impressive characteristics. There's a distinct lack of treble lift which gives a commendably smooth and civilised sound. Those used to metal-domed tweeters or speakers engineered to sound bright might initially find this unexciting, but it's actually more accurate and helps with longer-term listening which I found fatigue-free. Never once did I get the impression the Sendor A3s were trying to artificially impress me. Instead they just relayed what was on the disk in a confident and sure-footed manner.

Despite these good features there were some less impressive ones. Playing music with prominent bass lines I soon became aware that the designer has dialled in an obvious low frequency hump. Presumably its been done to enhance that big-sound-from-a-small-box appeal but the effect was overly prominent I feel. At times it robbed the music of pace as the bass appeared to overwhelm the rest of the music. There was a feeling that not all elements within a track were singing from the same hymn sheet.

Moving the speakers away from the rear wall helped - but not everyone will either want or be able to do that. Instead I found using a pair of bungs to damp the rear port gave the best result. Experimentation here is definitely recommended. Once fitted with bungs, the bass hump was significantly tamed and the music reverted to a whole again, allowing the lovely midband to work to its best effect. New Order's Technique went from slightly muddled sans bungs

to a much more detailed, visceral experience with them fitted.

Admittedly, this effect will vary from room to room (well-furnished, wooden floors, carpeted etc.) and with speaker placement, but it's a noticeable trait nonetheless.

That criticism aside, there is something undeniably right about these little Sendors. They do indeed produce a big, smooth sound from a small enclosure, one with a silky midband. The Sendors are speakers you could probably live with for years when other, seemingly more exciting products have begun to wear you down. Tame the bass with a pair of foam bungs and you are looking at a domestically-friendly floorstander that can paint a convincing musical portrait and is well worth a listen. Add in quality construction and there's little doubt Sendor has a winner on its hands with the smallest of its floorstanding range.

CONCLUSION

A large, civilised sound from a small enclosure, the A3 majors on midband smoothness, clarity and detail. It's an ideal loudspeaker for those looking for a natural, easy sound in a small space.

VERDICT

A fine little floorstander with a smooth, natural midband and even tonal balance, but bass heavy without bungs.

SPENDOR A3 £1295
Sendor
 ☎ +44 (0)1323 843474
 www.spendoraudio.com

FOR

- compact
- smooth treble
- civilised sound

AGAINST

- bass can be too prominent at times

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the A3 is very flat our analysis shows, so much so that it has obviously been optimised to have a flat on-axis pressure response - never a bad idea. It means the loudspeaker is best pointed straight at listeners; off-axis treble falls so the balance is toward an easy balance, lacking shrill treble. The tweeter looks especially smooth and is obviously a quality unit, likely a ring dome. The small upper midband lift will add detail and presence; this is an unusual characteristic; most loudspeakers dip here so the A3 will sound different. Below 300Hz there is also a clear step up in low frequency output, enough to add obvious warmth and body to the A3's sound, and likely 'obvious' bass because forward output reaches down to 55Hz. The rear port is fairly sharply tuned to 45Hz, the red trace of port output shows, and this correlates as usual with the impedance curve.

The bass unit has a high d.c.r of 6 Ohms and this sets the minima in our impedance plot. It also raises overall impedance to a high value of 10 Ohms, in conjunction with some unusually high peaks in the impedance curve, meaning the A3 is very reactive. This causes amplifiers to behave rather differently and they are likely to sound markedly different with it. High impedance means the A3 draws little current and needs a powerful amplifier to go loud; it delivered just 84dB Sound Pressure

Level from one nominal watt of input, a low value for a floor stander.

Our 200mS decay analysis inevitably shows the cabinet gets a little 'hot' below 200Hz so some boxiness or tubbiness may well be apparent. Conversely, coloration is very low from 20kHz down to 400Hz and this will certainly be an audible benefit.

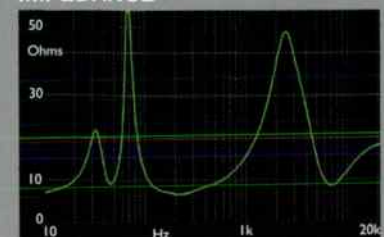
The A3 is very obviously a Sendor, meaning accurate and smooth, with an easy balance. It attempts big bass from a small cabinet too. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



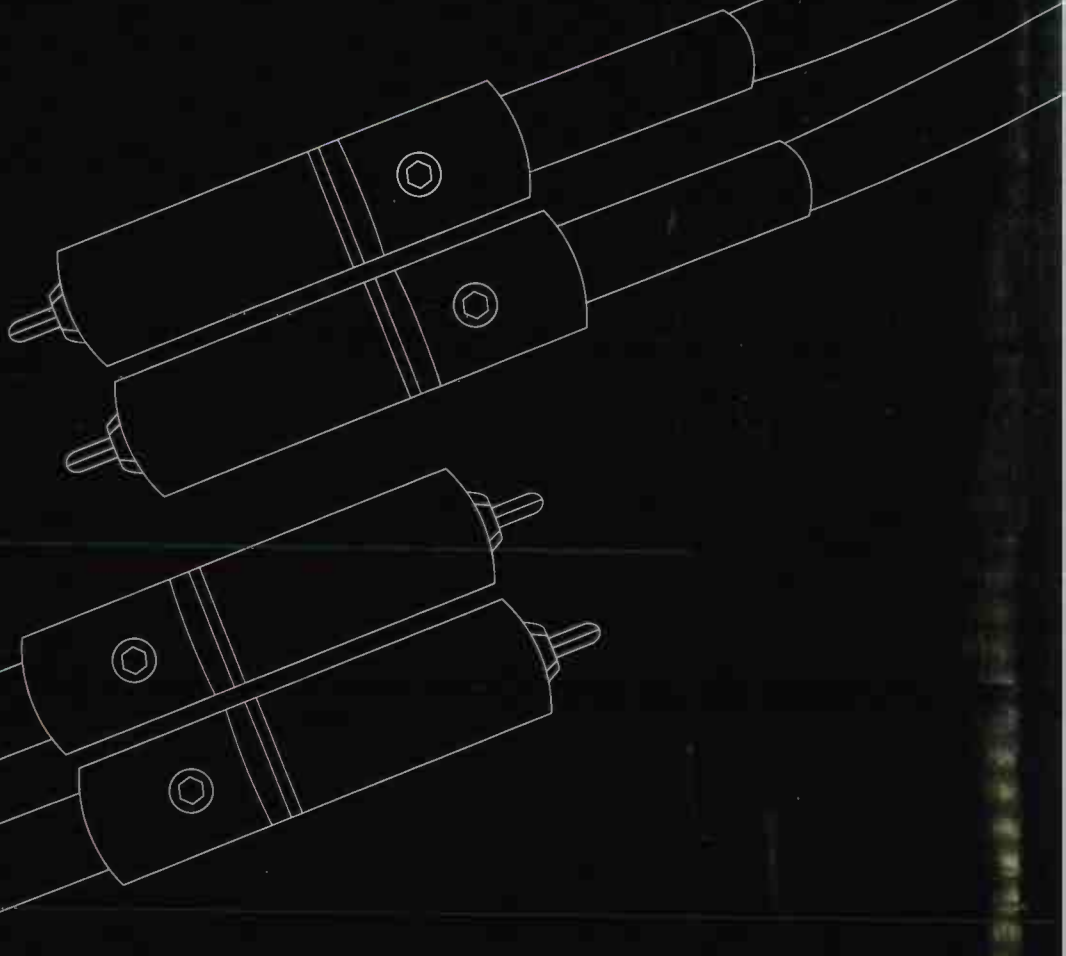
Green - driver output
 Red - port output

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Aqua duct

The Clarus Aqua cable is complex but revealing, says Tony Bolton

A couple of months ago I reviewed the Clarus Crimson interconnect and speaker cable (see Soundbites August 2012) and found them to have a very open and detailed sound. They have a more affordable sibling, the Aqua series under review here.

The same technologies, which are subject to five patents acquired over eight years of research, are applied to both ranges of cables. This is based around research carried out by company CEO, Jay Victor, who believes that differing frequencies require different cable topologies to transmit them effectively. To this end a single large gauge conductor is used to cover the bass frequencies. The midrange signal is carried along a flat ribbon cable and the treble uses what is described as a "spiral ribbon conductor". This consists of thin foil strips of high grade OFC copper which are wrapped around a core of polyethylene strands. These are then covered by a layer of polyethylene insulation to prevent strand interaction. Each of the different types of cable are also insulated from each other. The speaker cable has terminal blocks at each end where the combination of cables are gathered together before being terminated in the Company's own design of plugs. The difference between the two ranges is down to conductor gauge and the degree of silver plating involved.

Like their more

expensive counterparts, these cables are quite stiff so careful routing is required to avoid tight bends. Smaller components and speakers may need securing to their stands or shelves to avoid them being moved by the weight of these cables.

After 48 hours of running in using the Blue Horizon Cable Burn-In Accelerator I installed the interconnect between my Leema Agena phono stage and Tucana II amplifier, with the speaker cables running from the Tucana II to my Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.

The first record on was Gershwin playing 'Rhapsody in Blue'. This was recorded onto a piano roll by the composer in 1925, and in 1976 the roll was then replayed accompanied by a modern band for this recording. By the '20s, the better quality piano rolls included intonation in the recording so they actually contain the personal interpretation of the performance. For this recording a Duo-Art pianola grand was used, with the orchestration following Gershwin's original score for a jazz band accompaniment, rather than the full orchestration we are familiar with today.

The opening clarinet glissando, followed by the first piano chords came out of the Chario's with the energy and speed of an express train and led into quite a vivid and exciting rendition of the record. I enjoyed the wide open sound which gave me a panoramic window through which

to view the performance. The dynamic range of the recording was well described although it did not have quite as much depth and detail as it did when played

through the more expensive Crimson loom.

For a contrast I then put on Carole King's LP 'Tapestry'. With over 25,000,000



world wide sales I am sure it needs no introduction from me.

Suffice to say the natural artifice of

her voice shone through, sounding raw and fresh, with the instrumental accompaniment placed all around it on a very well lit soundstage, that was moderately wide and quite deep.

The only drawback that I found was the condition of the record (I would describe it as VG+) was also displayed in the same unrelenting detail. The wide bandwidth and explicit nature of these cables can make them a bit of a double edged sword.

They are very good, but will not suit every system or source. They require exemplary behaviour from all parts of the audio chain, otherwise you will be left in little doubt about where the shortcomings lie. As I said in the Crimson review, I would hesitate to plug these into equipment that already has a forward nature. Valve amps of good breeding would be suitable companions, or well designed solid state equipment. If they are partnering a turntable then Ortofon cartridges would be a better combination than Lyras, the latter being a little too explicit in the higher frequencies for a really comfortable listen in this environment.

A very good loom, but partner with great care.

MUSIC USED:

Carole King 'Tapestry'. A & M Records. AMLS 2025. 1971.

George Gershwin 'Plays Rhapsody in Blue'. Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the Columbia Jazz Band. CBS Records. 76509. 1976.

VERDICT ●●●●

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FOR

- extremely open sound
- spacious soundstage
- wide dynamic range

AGAINST

- could be too graphic for some systems
- very stiff

SYSTEM USED:

Clearaudio Master Solution/ Magnify arm/ Benz Micro Wood SL cartridge.
Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage and Tucana II amplifier.
Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.





Tubular Sells

Devoted to all things analogue, VTL has released a valve-encrusted integrated amplifier. Paul Rigby reviews the VTL IT-85.

US-based company Vacuum Tube Logic has been known as a power amp manufacturer. For many years, users in the 'States would buy another company's pre-amp and pair it with a VTL power amp. This was slightly



perturbing to Luke Manley, owner of the company and manager of an experienced team of engineers who see valves as the path to aural utopia and who produce excellent pre-amps and phono amps of their own. That is why the IT-85 integrated amplifier reviewed here is just a bit different from other

amplifiers of its class, "It's not just an amplifier with a volume on the front," said Manley. "We have two stand-alone models called the ST-85 (ST for stereo, a Stereo Power amplifier) and the TL-2.5 which is a blind line stage (TL for Two Line stage). We decided to combine the two into one chassis. That's why you see so many valves in the front end of the IT-85. The first two are our 12AU7s (ECC82) which are standard line stage gain valves, the second two are 12AT7s (ECC81). Once you get into those, that's similar to the valve complement of the ST-85."

Mixing the pre-amp and the power amp stages and putting them into a single box allowed VTL to have a full pre-amp with a Pre Out to possibly drive a sub-woofer or another power amp. "The emphasis is on reliability. We bias the valves

low so that they give long life, half of the value used by our competitors, at 30mA. We are after a modern and dynamic sound that I feel that only valves can provide."

On the outside of the chassis, the selector switch is a standard rotary model, "...but if you could take off the bottom cover of the amp, you would see that it runs all the way to the back board so you don't have to bring signal to the front panel, this lowers noise," said Manley.

The headphone jack sits next to the switch for headphones or speakers, a high current switch that connects to the output stage. The volume control is a motorised, 27mm pot, "a higher quality than the typical 16mm pot."

The Processor switch, in the up position, selects the direct amp input, turning the IT-85 into a power amp,

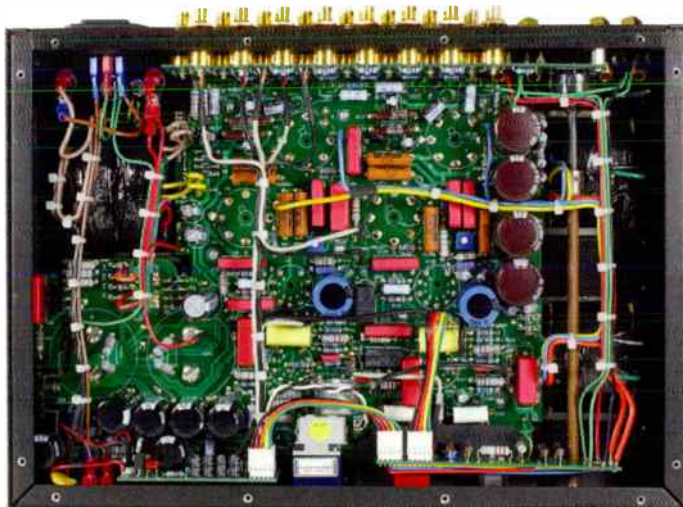
by-passing the pre-amp section. The next button is Mute selector.

The safety cage can be removed to replace valves or bias the amp., because this is a Fixed Bias design - meaning bias needs adjustment every few months.

Around the back, the speaker binding posts are situated at an angle: it saves a bit of space and doesn't bend the cable at such a drastic angle when spade connectors are used. There are eight pairs of phono sockets including a Tape, Amp In and Pre-Out. There are no balanced sockets here, it would have taken up more space and would have cost a lot more.

Inside? "It's a classic circuit. The ECC82 line stage is cascaded. This means that the first stage is driven which then drives the second stage, in sequence. The first half of the first 12AU7 (ECC81) is a buffer, the second half of that is the input stage for the power amp. The second ECC81 is the phase splitter for the push/pull output stage, then it's a push/pull output stage (one EL34) for each phase. It's a pretty simple circuit path, plus the output transformer."

Feedback is handled in a typically VTL manner, "There are two loops,



you great measurements and great speaker or amplifier control but the music becomes disjointed and boring. It's no longer engaging."

Known for its meaty bass, the IT-85, spanning 400x300x180mm and weighing in at 27kg, prevents core saturation or soft bass problems by special attention to the transformer, "Some of our competitors have designed saturation into the output transformer so that it provides tone

rectifiers or regulators. The purists would say that you have to go 'all valve' but I don't think that valves are ideally suited to power supplies, they are not very linear current devices, they wear out and they can collapse. If anything, this design lowers distortion because you have a stiffer power supply and better regulation."

SOUND QUALITY

Slipping Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism' into my Densen B-475 CD player, the bass was different when compared to my reference Icon MB845 monoblocks. The VTL provided a slightly dryer tone. There was just as much thump with possibly a touch less mass that gave the VTL a little more focus. Although the Icon is known for its powerful and forceful bass, the VTL produced a more involving sound that dug down into the subtle low frequency range.

What stood out like a beacon, however, was the raw emotion from lead singer, Skin, plus the instrumental separation in and around the ordered soundstage. The more insightful detail of the secondary percussion, such as tambourines, was deliciously highlighted and detailed. Connected with this was the low distortion levels spotlighted by the delicate cymbal work that could easily be discerned behind the loud, angry power chords of the lead guitar.

Moving to jazz and Horace Silver's 'Cape Verdean Blues', the first thing that attracted my ear was not the trumpet, sax or piano, but the quietly conscientious drum rolls that simmer beneath the brass leads.

Onto the piano lead which, at any time, is deceptively complex in

"one of the most 'realistic' integrated amplifiers on the market"

one around the power amp and one around the preamp., because it consists of two active stages and this means that you can look at the two stages as standalone circuits. Keeping the feedback low gives you more emotional connection to the music. Increasing the feedback gives

into the bass. I don't want to do that because saturation means distortion. I don't think that's the right approach, I'm not after a 'valve sound', I'm after an accurate sound. Valves should be linear and accurate. The bass is sorted via our use of solid state rectifiers. We don't use valve



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It also provided top quality playback of the rest of the track. Hence, bass was tight, well formed and characterful while the variety of additional percussive elements and considered guitar work sounded marvellously metallic in a rounded sense while the soundstage possessed enough room to allow each band member to have their moment in the sun.

Playing the original jazz album, 'Chet Baker Sings', this superior master showed what the VTL, for an integrated design, could do on the analogue plane. Baker's cultured tones were expressive with a series of nuances that told of the subtle tonal vibration here and a delicate sustain there, while his trumpet

playing was crystal clear. The lack of distortion provided a scarily focused delivery that gave the vocalist a real sense of being there, live, in the listening room. This humanism, the realism of reproduction from analogue source and the IT-85 is what music is all about, I felt.

CONCLUSION

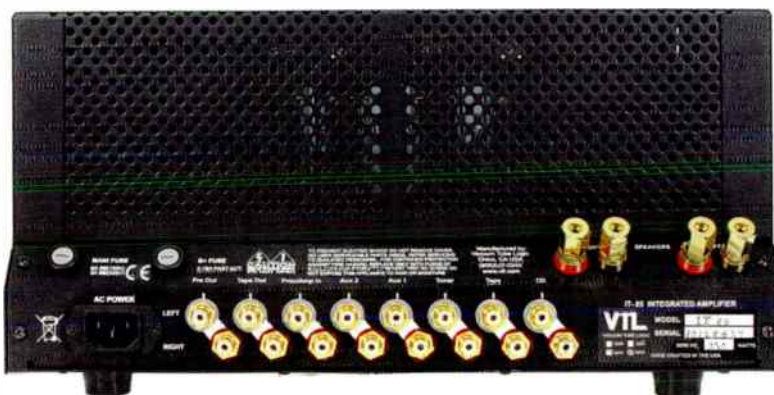
With a well recorded source, the VTL made me forget that I was listening to a hi-fi system at all. The music existed like a sonic projection. That's what the VTL is capable of doing, becoming seemingly invisible. It is one of the most 'realistic' integrated amplifiers on the market I feel and highly recommended.

this piece and subject to blurring. The VTL succeeded in defining each note, zeroing in upon the complex solo piece to add tremendous focus that gave the keyboard a balletic thrill.

The Icon thrived in extracting the emotional guts of the sax but the VTL went even further, adding a subtle yet important essence that provided a critical metallic flavour that was subtle yet significant in contributing to tonal colours. Call it 'reality', if you will, it provided what can only be called 'credibility' to the music.

Stevie Wonder's 'Sir Duke' played like a dream, right from the off. The sense of air being blown into the brass, right from the first few bars, was palpable. The bass was never dominant here but the tightness and security that it offered formed a sonic backdrop that the other instruments worked against, adding pure groove.

Turning to vinyl and spinning the Kansas album, 'Monolith' on my Avid Acutus turntable. This LP suffers from a level of compression which does produce bright moments during vocal crescendos. The linearity of the VTL was evidenced here via an inherent honesty. There was no overt sweetness to colour the output. This is a compressed LP and the VTL was here to confirm that. Hence, the compressed vocals experienced upper mid lift while the treble was rather bright. The VTL added nothing to the slightly harsh tones, it was neutral all the way. It just told the bare facts of the recording of this LP.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The VTL IT-85 produced 54 Watts into a 4 Ohm load and 45 Watts into an 8 Ohm load (1% thd) so it appears power matched for load values below 8 Ohms – a good thing. Most loudspeakers use 4 Ohm bass units and this is the common minimum load value of modern loudspeakers, one the IT-85 matches better than most. Being a U.S. amp. it is quite likely power matched to 4 Ohms.

One pair of EL34s in push-pull typically produce 40 Watts in self-bias. The IT-85 uses fixed bias to get higher output but the 60 Watts VTL claim is optimistic. How much power you get from valves depends upon how hard they are run, but run them too hard and their lifetime is shortened. EL34s produce a good sound and are cheap though, making this issue less critical.

The output transformers are good ones, as full output was produced at 40Hz, for 1% distortion. Midband distortion figures were very low too, around 0.1% as shown in our analysis.

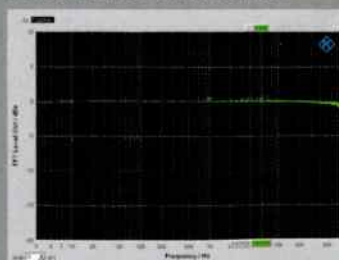
Frequency response was unusually wide, reaching 100kHz (-1dB). This is down to good transformers plus the use of feedback. The low end was not curtailed so LP warps will produce core saturation. There was plenty of gain, meaning high input sensitivity.

The VTL IT-85 is basically well designed. It should provide clean bass, due to quality output transformers. It

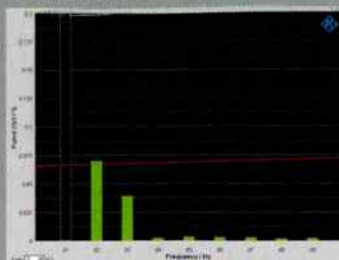
also develops plenty of power into low loads. However, squeezing 54 Watts of power from one pair of EL34s is asking a lot. NK

Power	45watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	2Hz-110kHz
Separation	75dB
Noise	-82dB
Distortion	0.23%
Sensitivity	120mV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



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XTZ 99.26 MKII 'SPEAKERS

For the 99.26, Eliasson decided to use "...the best SEAS driver available, the Excel, normally found in expensive speaker designs such as the \$100,000 Steinway-Lyngdorf".

When it comes to a unit that has good bass performance "...you're looking at a driver that is stiff, made from magnesium, aluminium and the like, working like a piston. The problem, though, is that when you rise to a certain frequency via the mid-

bass cone, you get the high peak of a resonance frequency".

"This is where the problems arise and the compromises begin. When you design a two-way speaker, you cannot run the tweeter too low before you decide to crossover, otherwise you will have high distortion within the tweeter. On the other side, your mid/bass unit cannot operate too high, otherwise it will have a peak and you will hear that instead".

The new cross-over in the 99.26 helps to reduce distortion. "Even with the lower efficiency, which requires more amplification power, the lower distortion and flatter frequency response results in a better sounding speaker".

The ribbon tweeter, a Fountek from China, is XTZ's driver of choice.

According to Eliasson, "this particular tweeter has a balanced frequency response that sounds good and exhibits low distortion. We just had to cap it at the right point".

Eliasson also likes that the off-axis dispersion angle is quite narrow. "We picked the ribbon because I like the sound and the directivity which means less influential room interference. We claim that a flat frequency response is the best compromise".

Weighing in at 10kg and spanning 244x379x352 mm, "the speaker cabinet uses 25mm MDF with a piano black finish which I claim is thick enough to be stable. We also use lots of damping material. It's a pretty expensive cabinet to make – for the price point. The shape is another reason too, it involved lot of processing".

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QUESTIONS

[1] Which SEAS driver is used?

- [a] Exotic
- [b] Prestige
- [c] Excel
- [d] Lotus

[2] The crossover helps to reduce?

- [a] Distortion
- [b] Noise
- [c] Crackles
- [d] Pops

[3] The ribbon tweeter is from?

- [a] Ford
- [b] Mexico
- [c] Monserrat
- [d] Fountek

[4] They weigh in at?

- [a] 20kg
- [b] 1 tone
- [c] 10kg
- [d] 15 ounces

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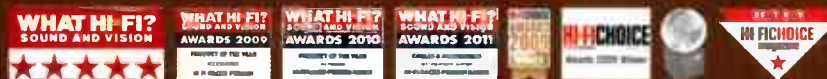
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Trough-line

part II

Neville Roberts continues his explanation of how to restore a Leak Trough-Line FM tuner at home – without damaging it!



Trough-Line 2 front view before upgrades

In the September 2012 issue I explained how this legendary tuner works, and my experiences buying a dusty old MkII for £60. Here I look at what you can replace, and what you must not touch, when restoring the Trough-Line, as well as model differences and fitting a stereo decoder.

As far as I could determine, all the valves of my old Trough-Line were original 'old shield' Mullard types. Armed with my trusty B&K Dyna-Jet Model 606 Valve Tester, I found that all but two of the valves were performing almost as good as new – not bad for fifty year old glass bottles! However, two of them had problems – my VI (ECC84) had a heater/cathode short (the cascode RF stage – it was amazing the set was working!) and my V6 (EM84 magic eye) was low on emission. I was able to replace both of them with New Old Stock (NOS) valves for a few pounds found on eBay. The result was a stronger signal and even Radio 3 was showing a near maximum on the tuning indicator. I am fortunate to have a good signal here in the Bournemouth area and I have a loft-mounted FM aerial.

Before starting to replace ageing components, it is most important to know first what not to touch. I had already learnt through bitter experience many years ago how to convert a working FM tuner into spare parts for the junk box by tweaking coils without the necessary test equipment or expertise. Apart from a multimeter and digital capacitance/inductance meter, I didn't have any RF equipment available,

so I decided early on not to touch the RF/IF stages at all. The coils, etc., would have been carefully setup during manufacture. Furthermore, there are a number of components that are not easily replaceable, such as those contained within the IF cans and others, such as feed-through capacitors.

In the 'must replace' category are the fifty year-old electrolytic capacitors, and that means rebuilding the HT (High Tension) power supply. That's not as difficult as you might think as there are only four components, and one of those is the rectifier valve!

Also a must is fitting a quality stereo decoder, but more about that later...

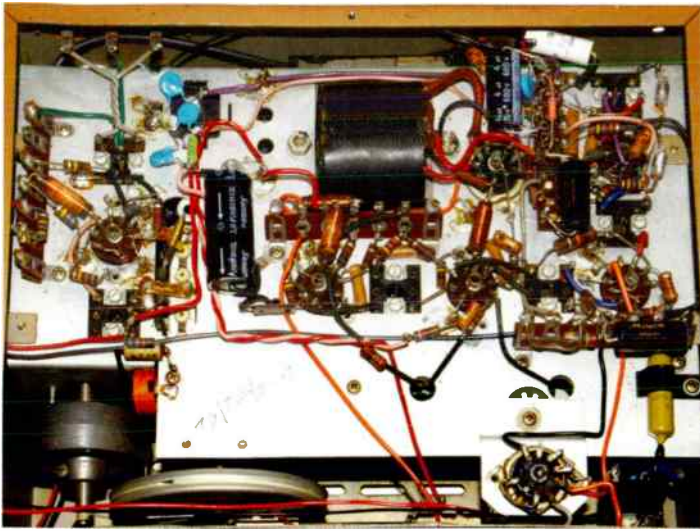
So, first up was to source a replacement for the now unobtainable triple-can electrolytic capacitor which would doubtless have gone leaky by now. It is essentially three 40µF 300V capacitors in one can. What I did find was a 50µF + 50µF 500V in one can – a Mundorf M-Lytic High Voltage dual power electrolytic capacitor to replace both C47 and C52 in the accompanying circuit diagram, plus a separate axial-lead Suntan 47µF 450V which fitted the bill for the third capacitor C24 nicely.

To replace the triple can, first

unsolder the connections to the three solder tags. Then untwist three of the four retaining tags on the can. The fourth one is soldered to the chassis and I found the easiest way to remove it was to tap a thin screwdriver underneath it and prise it away – the capacitor then comes away easily. Using a junior hacksaw blade, I enlarged the hole by cutting away the bit of metal on the top and bottom slots. The Mundorf then fitted nicely in the space and the earth tag was soldered onto the chassis in the same place as the old can with my iron turned up to maximum heat! I also fitted a capacitor clip on the capacitor and secured it with a single nut and bolt through a hole drilled in the chassis – see photos.

The next task was to replace the other electrolytic capacitor C56 (4µF 250V) with a new 4µF 600V counterpart. I also fitted all these with a bypass 0.01µF 1kV ceramic disc capacitor (the bright blue ones in the photographs) as electrolytics are not good at high frequencies. The other power supply component requiring replacement was the 1k Ohm 15W resistor next to the Mundorf can and that was replaced with a modern Mills wire-wound type.

With reference to the circuit diagram, it can be seen that most



Chassis underside with upgrades completed

of the components around V5B will never be used, as that part of the circuit is for the mono output. Although I had replaced the volume control in my unit because of the faulty on/off switch, I removed the mono output flying lead as this will not be required after fitting the stereo decoder. In the end, I just changed the components circled on the diagram with new carbon resistors and polystyrene film for the low value capacitors. As for the 0.1µF

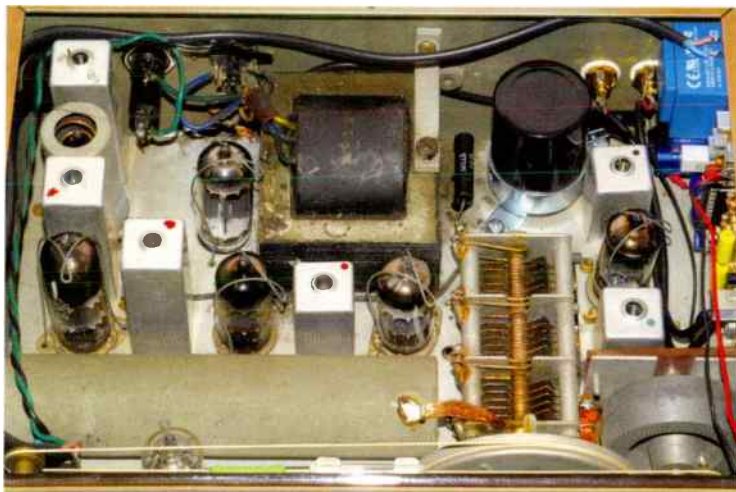
supply a top quality stereo decoder board, complete with its own mains power supply on board, suitable for installing in a Trough-Line for £120. They also provided me with invaluable advice on how to get the best from my unit, as well as all the extra parts to enable easy drilling of the metalwork to accommodate the decoder.

The decoder is based around the LM4500AN Hi-Fi FM demodulator. It has a very low quoted distortion

The bulk of the work to fit the decoder is drilling the case to accommodate the two RCA phono sockets on the rear panel and the three mounting holes for the printed circuit board (for which One Thing provide a drilling template). Also included with the board is a little red LED as the stereo beacon, which I wanted to mount in the front dial backplate next to the EM84 tuning indicator.

When drilling (and filing) the metalwork, be sure to use plenty of masking tape (especially on the front dial) to minimise the risk of scratching the paintwork should the drill slip! It is really worth the effort of doing this carefully as the final result can look very professional, which is very rewarding.

To connect the decoder, first wire up the stereo output sockets and then connect the decoder input to the multiplex output socket (I connected this at the tag strip end, rather than the phono socket) via a supplied 1µF 160V coupling capacitor. Next, hook up the stereo LED beacon (observe the correct polarity of the LED) and finally the mains input to the connections on the Trough-Line on/off switch. Time to switch on and listen!



Chassis topside with upgrades completed

and 0.25µF capacitors, I replaced these with 0.1µF and 0.22µF 630V Mundorf ZN capacitors respectively.

Allow yourself plenty of time to do these component changes and ensure you have a good temperature-controlled soldering iron available, or a fixed one of around 40W to do the job. Some of the tag strips require a lot of heat to melt the solder – especially those connected to the chassis earth. With the component upgrades complete, it was time to consider a stereo decoder...

TWO'S COMPANY

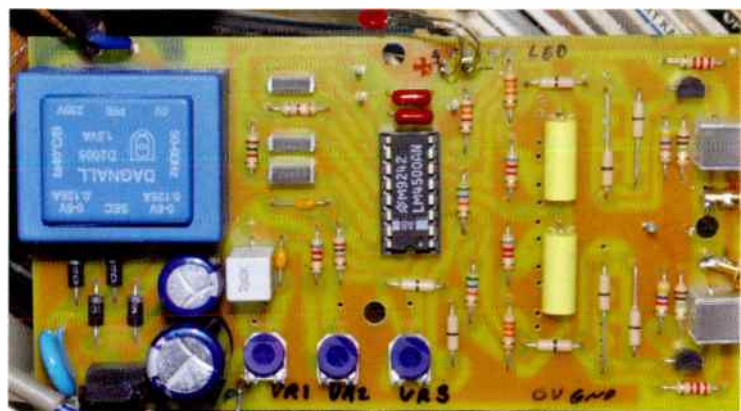
Following some research, I found one company, One Thing Audio, who can

figure of 0.1% and features a blend circuit which optimises the signal-to-noise ratio under weak signal conditions by gradually combining left and right channel information. There are three potentiometers on the decoder board – VR1 adjusts the input gain, VR2 is the oscillator lock and VR3 is the stereo separation control. VR2 and 3 are 'factory set' and should not require adjustment, but VR1 will probably need rotating clockwise to reduce the level as the output from a Trough-Line tuner is quite high.

PREMIER PERFORMANCE

With the AFC switched off and the Trough-Line tuned in to Radio 3 at 90.7MHz, the tuning indicator again showed a good, strong signal and the stereo beacon lit up, showing that all was well. There was no audible hiss (or hum for that matter) and the Trough-Line was so quiet that I wondered if I had connected everything up correctly. As it turned out, it happened to coincide with a pause between movements of a broadcast concert and when the orchestra started playing, I quickly realised that all my efforts had been richly rewarded!

The sound was absolutely superb – full and rich as you might expect from a valve tuner, and with



One Thing stereo decoder board

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excellent image placement, so the decoder was doing its stuff rather well. In fact, all I could hear was the lovely Trough-Line sound and I was completely unaware of another circuit – i.e., the stereo decoder – in the signal path, a real testament to the One Thing decoder.

What was really incredible was the sense of presence and the feeling that you were sitting there in the studio with all the performers. It is difficult to put into words the sense of immediacy and realism I felt. I worked briefly for the BBC as a student in the nineteen seventies, during which time I had the opportunity to work in a studio and it was like having that experience all

feel some realignment is required, send it off to a professional company like One Thing Audio who can do this for you. However, there is one exception – the Foster-Seeley discriminator coil (T4 on the circuit and the one located next to the fuse at the rear). This is the one you can tune by ear and I am indebted to Ron and Steve at One Thing for this advice.

To carry out this adjustment, ensure that the station is optimally tuned once the tuner has had at least ten minutes to warm up. Leave the AFC switch in the 'off' position. Then, with the appropriate trimming tool, gently turn the bottom slug in both directions



Stereo decoder fitted inside

the old stereo decoder. The Trough-Line I is not worth upgrading for use as a Hi-Fi component because of its limited frequency range.

Restoring and upgrading my old Trough-Line has been a highly rewarding experience and I have ended up with a tuner that will not be out of place in the best audio systems. And I also rather like the addition of an 'art deco' item to my system.

WEBSITE

You can read/download the circuit diagram with red circled components as a PDF on our website. Go to [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/Tuners/Knowledge/LeakTroughline restoration](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/Tuners/Knowledge/LeakTroughline%20restoration).

SAFETY

All valve (tube) equipment contain dangerous voltages and old equipment is especially dangerous because of decay. Before switching on check that the chassis is earthed using a continuity meter (Maplins sell them) and check again by using a neon screwdriver that it isn't live after switch on.

A common practice is to wind up mains slowly using a Variac, to avoid a sudden bang and possible damage to the mains transformer, or fire from an overheating component.

After switching off, high voltages will be maintained by the electrolytic power supply capacitors, unless they are fitted with bypass resistors of around 100k.

Farnell and RS Components can supply parts, as can Maplins.



Rear view of Trough-Line showing stereo sockets fitted

over again with the atmosphere of a live performance all around you.

However, I'm sad to say that was not the case across all stations! Tuning into, well, let's just say into a station further up the dial, was a bit of a disappointment, to say the least. It became apparent that not everyone uses the same quality of compression that the BBC uses, nor does everyone take the same care with the broadcast quality (especially with live concerts). The level of distortion that is evident with some stations is due to a combination of poor compression, high modulation and artificial boosting of the top and bottom end in an effort to tailor the broadcasts for in-car listening and little tranny portables! Of course, a lot of this goes unnoticed when listening on DAB, but all shortcomings are clearly revealed when listening through a quality system.

Incidentally, I have never experienced any drifting with the Trough-Line, so I tend to leave the AFC switched off – partly because it is unnecessary, but mainly because I like to see the lovely green glow of the 'magic eye' next to the red of the stereo LED.

As I have mentioned previously, do not attempt to adjust the IF cans without the necessary test equipment or expertise. If you do

about half a turn until you locate the optimum setting for minimum distortion. Then go to the top slug and do the same until you achieve maximum audio output. One word of warning; the slugs might be seized up, in which case do not attempt to force them as they can easily disintegrate and you can even damage the plastic core. In that case, leave well alone, or send it away for professional care if absolutely necessary.

CONCLUSION

Although the modifications I have described here are for a Trough-Line II, they equally apply to the III as the circuit is virtually identical. A similar set of upgrades can be performed on the Trough-Line Stereo by noting the different numbering of the components on the newer model and by replacing



The finished Trough-Line II – now in stereo!

CONTACT

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A pair of KEF Q100 loudspeakers are on their way to **DAVID A DEEKS**, Letter of the Month winner in our **SEPTEMBER 2012** issue.

Letter of the Month

IN A FUNK

We all understand the update process right! First comes a sneaky dissatisfaction with our listening experience, followed by a visit to your trusted retailer to articulate your problem. He then suggests some possible upgrades that you demo and after usually a short while you categorise the update as either; a worthwhile improvement for the price, a worthwhile improvement but not at the price, or not much of an improvement.

This has been my personal experience of upgrading for the last forty years. However, I recently tried out a piece of equipment that refused to be categorised until I resolved a crisis, of its making, in my understanding of what music is, and my relationship to it; let me set the scene.

I have been a music lover, and hence audiophile for over forty years, and in that time I have reluctantly moved to digital media. Having said that, my Chord Electronics Blu and DAC64 combination creates great analogue-like musicality, for digital that is.

On the analogue side I have had many turntable combinations including twenty years with a Linn LP12. A couple of years ago I got rid of my LP12 (don't ask), but eventually succumbed once again to the desire for that vinyl sound. Fortunately Matt of New Model Audio, who has been helping me through the hi-fi maze for many years, supplied me with a very heavily breathed on Rega RP3...and a half that he had built.

To my ears I was astounded to find that it sounded far more musical



Funk FXR11 "makes it very clear that most of this warmth is massive colouration from the tonearm" says Dean.

and even handed than my LP12 and Ittok LVII, which is a result for £500! Anyway I settled down for a long and meaningful relationship with my successful upgrade. But – and its the but we all know – after a while I wanted a bit more from the sound; here we go again!

I returned to Matt for a chat and he suggested that I tried the Funk FXR11. Now as a man gets older his wallet tightens (it's about the only thing that does) and a grand or so for a tonearm! I can't afford that! But, as usual temptation got the better of me and a few days later Matt turned up to fit the arm for a home demo; sound familiar?

Once fitted Matt put on Suzanne Vega's Luka and wow – I was completely underwhelmed! The music sounded insubstantial and light, where

had the weight gone? Yet there was sweetness, rhythm and detail that I had not been conscious of before. Matt added a bit of tracking weight and suggested I just had a listen and wisely he beat a hasty retreat. So, let the crisis commence.

Part of me knew that the sound that was now being channelled from my Goldring G1042 cartridge, through my Korora phono stage, to my Chord SPM 2600 and out of my Tannoy TD8 speakers was in every way far superior to that using my standard RB301. But the sound was more like my Blu and DAC64; that is, more digital! And yet there was a massive increase in the sweetness, roundness and wholeness that I associate with vinyl.

This did not compute and I found this situation all very unsettling. Part of my mind was in a confused state as

opposed to fully processing what I was hearing, but I was conscious that what I was hearing was somehow, 'right'. I kept playing album after album and although enjoying the experience I was not emotionally fully engaged with the music. I also found that my emotional response varied much more with each album than it had ever done before. It seemed that my mind needed more data to work a few things out. Then after acquiring enough input I had my epiphany! I realized that for the last forty years my perception of the characteristic vinyl sound has been misguided.

Vinyl has always had a warmth to it that I have grown to find inviting and appealing, and for me it enhanced the nostalgia that listening to vinyl can elicit; this was an acceptable part of my musical experience.

The problem is that the Funk makes it very clear that most of this warmth is massive colouration from the tonearm that pervades the entire frequency range. With this revelation the warmth transmuted to a stodginess that restricted the music from breathing and expanding fully in space and time. The sound emanating from my system was vastly superior to anything I had ever heard, but was it better music?

The truth is that I was mourning the passing of that comfort blanket of warmth, behind which musical truth lay. Music was being laid bare in a way I had never experienced. There was still intimacy, but only when conveyed by the artist or the production values of the recording. Up to that point I had a preconception of what I expected vinyl to sound like and now I was hearing something that was in part its antithesis.

Some of my albums became a little disappointing, whilst others were a revelation. I also found that if I actively listened to the music then the pros vastly outweighed the cons. But if I strayed into a more background music mode then I wasn't dragged into the music like the old RB301 days. Quite frankly it was an extraordinary musical and psychological experience.

I have read some critiques of the FXR11 that in some ways support my views. Some have said it can lack musicality, or be too clinical and I can empathise with such views. However I think it is doing the genius of the Funk a dis-service to not work fully through my issues. I had to accept that the normal process of upgrading was broken and I had to ask myself some searching questions.

Firstly I had to accept that the astounding precision and delicacy of the Funk was highlighting limitations in my very impressive, but budgetary

challenged Firestone Korora and G1042. And given the cost of the Funk I would be unlikely to upgrade either component in the near future. Can I live with this? Oh yes.

For me, one of the aspects of being an audiophile that I have not questioned for a very long time is 'musical truth'. It is important to me that what I hear is as near to how the artists want to convey their music as is possible. This means that I want to hear what they have to say and not what my system wants me to hear, and there is no doubt in my mind that the Funk lives up to this ideal.

So can I go back to my RB301. Probably, but there would be an ever growing part of me that wanted greater musical truth and just more of everything, and that's Funk territory. So being a complex adaptive system I have decided to stick with it and adapt to my environment, because I am aware that my appreciation of vinyl replay is changing, for the better. At the end of the day I can't stop listening to my albums to see what they really sound like and to be honest, in most cases I am still a little confused, but totally awestruck.

The few professional reviews of the Funk that I have seen have poured praise on this tonearm, but these are critiques by audiophiles who have lived with high end vinyl replay for years and have become accustomed to this

paradigm shift in what the vinyl sound is. However, for most of us who enjoy our mid-fi turntables this is a complete revelation. So, yes I whole heartedly recommend that you demo the FXR11, but please have a home demo and give it the time it deserves, and be aware that it may just play with your head!

Regards,
Dean Marshall

That's an interesting experience Dean. But you do need to move up from a Goldring 1042 and the Korora. I strongly suggest you peruse our budget Moving Coil cartridge group test in the May 2012 issue, also on our website www.hi-fiworld.co.uk, bearing in mind that a solid low end performance might restore balance. Perhaps the new Audio Technica AT OC9 MLIII would suit.
NK

MINI CHOICE

I was a bit disappointed that you chose to review the Usher Dancer Mini-One rather than the Mini-Two in the March 2012 issue of HI-FI World. I agree that there is a treble bias in this speaker, but it is possible that the larger cone area dedicated to the lower frequencies in the Mini-Twos (they have two woofers, in contrast to the one woofer in the Mini-Ones) might have provided a better frequency balance. One finds that the D'Appollito WTW array



Usher Mini-Two is the one you should have reviewed, says Ron Levine.

typically civilizes aggressive tweeters in many speakers and this arrangement in the Mini-Two might be the perfect salve for the rather dominant quality of the Usher Diamond tweeter. Is there a chance of reviewing the Mini-Two in the near future to test this hypothesis?

Ron Levine
Philadelphia
USA

Hi Ron. Thanks for your letter. We sent it to Usher in Taiwan and your prayers have been answered: a pair are being run in right now and are



The new Icon Audio MB845 MkII amplifier has circuit updates and some trad. meters - lovely! It uses 845 transmitter triodes to deliver 110 Watts.

on their way to us soon. Hopefully, they will make the next (November 12) issue.

Like many modern loudspeakers, Ushers use homogenous synthetic materials for better sound quality, so they need a lot of running in – 100-200 hours no less. This eases the brightness. Having said that although their Diamond tweeter measures flat (i.e. peak free) across the audio band, there is some smooth accentuation of treble toward high frequencies in the Mini-One. This can be seen in their frequency response published on the website, www.hi-fiworld.co.uk at Loudspeakers/Reviews/Usher Dancer Mini-One. The steady lift will ensure the Mini-One is 'obviously detailed', shall we say. A small lift like this can be ameliorated by pointing the speakers straight down the room so they are listened to off-axis, and the balance suits well furnished rooms where curtains and carpet etc absorb reflected treble energy. Hence the decryption 'obviously detailed' rather than 'bright'! It depends upon circumstance with a lift as small as this. By current standards the Mini-One is not overly bright; there are plenty of loudspeakers out there with far stronger treble.

As you suggest, two woofers in D'Appollito arrangement may well

alter the perceived balance and make the Mini-Two seem more balanced, but of course you pay more too. **NK**

AMP RESEARCH

Help – what do I do, get Icon Audio MB854 Mk IIs or an Audio Research VS115? It doesn't look like I will be able to get a home demo (or any demo actually) of either of them.

Current system is Benchmark DAC HDR feeding Beard P35 power amp feeding Pro-AC Response 1.5s. Sounds really good but I think that it could be beaten by one of the two power amps.

What do you think?

All the best,

Paul Hayes

That is a really difficult one Paul. Both the VS115 and the MB845 MkII (now MkIIIm) monoblocks offer nominally 100 Watts per channel and both have big dynamics, with great bass control. Of the two, the Audio Research has tighter bass, because it has a higher damping factor. However, the MB845 MkIIIs go very low, so the distinction between them is a fine one. The VS115 has clear, bright higher frequencies, where the MB845 MkII is a tad softer and easier going. However, the big graphite anodes of the 845 tubes,

the massive output transformers and huge power supply of the Icon amp ensure a big, meaty sound that injects real body and timbral richness into music - delicious. Both are tube muscle amps that will shake the room and send transistor amps scurrying for cover. They deliver music with vast scale: you will be impressed. The VS115 has transistors in it and is closest to a tranny amp with cojones, as it were. The MB845 MkII is more expansive in its sound staging and general presentation.

Cost wise there is little in it when it comes to tube replacement / rolling. You are looking at around £100/channel.

Sorry not to be able to make a choice for you. But you know, its like choosing between Catherine Zeta Jones or Rachel Weisz isn't it? **NK**

ANGLE ISSUE

As Allen Edelstein says (*Letters, August 2012*), changing the vertical tracking force (VTF) of a pickup also changes its vertical tracking angle (VTA), so this could be responsible for changes in sound quality. He should note that if the pickup arm has an underslung counterweight, the converse is also true: raising or lowering the arm to adjust VTA will also change the VTF. Therefore either VTA or VTF could be responsible for changes in sound quality. Mr Edelstein believes that it is VTA, not VTF, which is important – but where is his evidence? The fact that his theory was published in *Stereophile* 30 years ago does not mean it is true.

Some basic information:

- * record cutter VTA: 22 degrees
- * Ortofon 2M VTA: 22-23 degrees;
- * Goldring 2400 VTA: 32 degrees;
- * Baerwald alignment lateral tracking angle error with 229mm arm: +1.9/-1.1 degrees.



Audio Research VS115 uses big KT120 tubes in output pairs to deliver 120 Watts. This is a U.S. muscle amp.

Letters On-Line!

You can now read our Letters on-line, from the last issue back to March 2010. That's a treasure trove of information and advice to our readers, as well as a fascinating catalogue of reader's systems and views. There's mountains of buying information, all just a click away on your computer or i-Pad. Have fun!

You can reply to Letters using the e-mail link at the top of the page -

World Mail June 2011 issue

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Letters are published first in the magazine, then here in our web archive. We cannot guarantee to answer all mail, but we do manage most!

Or comment in the Comment section at the bottom of each page.

Your experts are -
DP David Price, editor; **NK** Noel Keywood, publisher; **PR** Paul Rigby, reviewer; **TB** Tony Bolton, reviewer; **RT** Rafael Todes, reviewer (Alegri String Quartet); **AS** Adam Smith, reviewer; **DC** Dave Cawley, Sound Hi-Fi, World Design, etc.

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These items help keep LPs clean, says Melvyn Dover.

The VTA changes caused by small changes in VTF or arm height are simple to calculate:

* 0.1g VTF change: VTA change 0.19 degrees (cartridge with 20mm/N compliance and 6mm cantilever);

* 1mm arm height change: VTA change 0.25 degrees (229mm arm).

If up to 2 degrees error in lateral tracking angle (which is more important than VTA, as it affects centre images) is acceptable and if cartridges may have inherent VTA errors of up to 10 degrees, how can a 0.2 degree VTA change have a significant effect on sound quality?

If tonal balance is affected by changing tracking weight (which it is), the reasons must lie elsewhere - e.g. changes in generator alignment and compression of the rubber in the cantilever suspension.

If Mr Edelstein wishes to continue to argue that VTA, not VTF, is responsible, he needs to come up with a scientific explanation for what he thinks is happening. When raising or lowering his arm pivot height to adjust VTA, he should also take care to rebalance the arm and reset the VTF. He may well find that when this is done the changes sound quality disappear, showing that they were caused by the change in VTF, not VTA.

Yours sincerely,
Alasdair Beal

Er - yes, Alasdair. As you note when changes in VTA are calculated they are minuscule. However, there are so many variables in this mix that I tend not to try and get too



... and here is what fell out of an old LP sleeve.

scientifically reductionist about it. The LP was a very ad-hoc analogue storage mechanism that sort-of got beaten into shape after it was invented - a strange way of doing things by modern standards, if one still in action today with the motor car. Vinyl LPs suffer an effect Benjamin Bauer of CBS Labs termed "lacquer springback" after cutting and this also makes actual mod slant angle of the groove approximate. Metal masters helped control this, but introduced other problems. It does seem that if a cartridge measures well it sounds half decent, but test discs are variable in themselves, making absolute accuracy is elusive. The LP is a gloriously approximate piece of plastic that I like to enjoy rather than get too serious about. **NK**

DE-MAGNETISE

Should I de-magnetize my 20 year old Clearaudio Signature Cartridge? If 'yes', then how should it be done? There is much conflicting advice on this subject and any help would be very welcome.

**Stan Abrahams,
Ditchling,
Sussex**

Clearaudio say -
We do not recommend demagnetising our moving coil cartridges.

Demagnetising a moving coil cartridge changes the magnetic field inside the cartridge which in some cases may be an improvement but not in others. If you wish to experiment then by no means use any type of device that sends any current through the coils as this may destroy the very delicate 24 carat gold coils and permanently damage the cartridge.

**Robert Suchy: President,
Clearaudio**

CLEAN SWEEP

When cleaning records with Knosti's Disco Antistat, I've found a few fairly cheap extra items can help. First of all I clean the records using a carbon fibre brush. This gets rid of a lot of dirt on used records. Anything more stubborn at this stage I wipe with isopropanol on a cotton wool bud.

A litre of fluid is fine for two Antistat baths. Rather than mix used fluid with new I use old fluid bottles or something collapsible/airtight like a cycling water bottle for the used. (See figure 1). This I label.

The supplied filter papers leave something to be desired so I use coffee filters, which are much more effective at filtering record dirt. These are held in a stainless steel sieve (99p for a set of three). Normally I use the four cup size in a larger sieve, placed over a 2L plastic jug (99p for set of two.) Figure 1 shows the 2-cup filter. This not only provides a better filtering system, but makes it a lot easier to empty the Antistat bath without spillage. In this way the fluid stays clean enough to be used up to ten times, though by then I'd say it has lost its antistat properties and becomes more or a cleaning fluid. Still useful for improving not too important purchases though. Filters, sieves and jug are kept for the purpose.

While the records are drying I repair covers using a glue-stick or even sticky tape. When dry the clean records go into new sleeves.

One record I cleaned today was a 10-inch one of Songs by Tom Lehrer. Inside the cover I found a concert programme (Figure 2) for his show at the Royal Festival Hall on 29 June 1960. It's a small booklet which cost one shilling and contains adverts, including one for a record of the show by him, in 'super satirical stereo' from Decca. Quite a bonus and something to treasure.

best wishes,
**Melvyn Dover
Weymouth
Dorset**

TRAD GARRARD

Bubinga plinth, all internal spaces fully damped. Check out the brass inlay logo across the front... Its at Innovation Audio

in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. Excellent vintage retailer with fab repair/restore facility. Proprietor is one Gord Stauck. A rare resource in this part of the world.

Andy Smith
Canada

Like the picture Andy - thanks. Innovative Audio (www.iavscanada.com) has some tasty items on its shelves. I was bemused by Sonos labelling this as "old school hi-fi" (see p60) in contrast to their wi-fi connected all-in-one systems. How perceptions change. Whilst we are on promotion of specialist hi-fi services on the American sub-continent, Woodsong Audio, Sandpoint, Idaho USA (www.woodsongaudio.com) also make some lovely looking turntable plinths in a wide range of woods. I'll stay with old school! **NK**

HARSH DOWN UNDER

I have been a sporadic reader of your publication for about 15 years and have kept many issues that I like to refer back to when I feel it's time for a change/upgrade to my system. It all started back in 1995 (issue Vol.5 No.3) with a comparison review you did on Thorens TD124 and Garrard 401. This article had stuck in my mind and a couple of years ago I wandered past a local hi-fi store, got chatting and they just happened to have a well looked after Mk1 which I promptly purchased. I have since had the unit checked and serviced by a local expert and have installed a Rega RB301 tone arm.

I recently upgraded my amplifier from an ageing pair of Musical Fidelity XA-50 monoblocks with X-pre and X-LP to the well-reviewed Icon Audio Stereo 40 MkIII (having always wanted to try valve amplification). Current speakers are Tannoy Revolution R2, speaker cables are Nordost flat line. Not sure on interconnects as they were supplied by the dealer but I assume OK quality. I have also purchased an Icon Audio PS2 phono stage. I alternate between a Goldring 1042 and Ortofon 2M Black cartridge.

OK, so to my dilemma. Since upgrading to the Icon Audio amp whilst I can hear a fantastic difference in the whole presentation of the music from soundstage and detail to the overall shape of the sound the treble is very harsh. Unbearable in fact on most tracks, limiting my listen levels so as not to offend my ears. My musical taste is mainly 60's pop/rock and modern alternative.

I am chasing your help on what path I should go on to relieve this. I feel the speakers may be to blame so an upgrade is on the cards. I really do like the Tannoy presentation and



"Old school" audio on the shelves of Innovative Hi-Fi in British Columbia, Canada. Looks better than new school, doesn't it?

recently audition a pair of DC6T signatures and did like the sound. However I am still worried about the treble harshness. I do like floorstanders and room size is 9m x 5 m firing across the lesser width. Could the treble issues caused by a bad synergy between the amp and speakers? The treble was fine with the X-A50s. Or should I look elsewhere within the system? I have a budget of approx. 1500 UKP to play with. My musical taste is mainly 60's pop rock and modern alternative.

Many thanks in advance,
Anthony Hurd
Sydney
Australia

Harsh treble from an Icon Audio Stereo 40 MkII is hard to understand, so I asked Icon Audio to respond – see below. Even if pushed into overload valve amps like this one



Idaho, USA, boasts Woodsong Audio, who also make some lovely turntable plinths. Take a look at their website www.woodsongaudio.com.

don't become harsh, rather they thicken up and become congested. The Tannoy R2s are unlikely to become harsh either. I wonder whether there might be a fault in the amp. To check this you need to



Garrard 301 in Bubinga plinth with lovely Garrard logo across the front.

listen to each channel in turn to see if one is different to the other, or go back to your dealer and listen to another sample on the premises to see if it sounds different. If it does then you need to return the amp to be checked. I presume you have tried using the 4 Ohm output, as this will probably give best results.

It could just be that you are grossly overloading the amp by playing at very high volume. If so, take a look at the Epos Elan 45 loudspeakers reviewed in this issue. A vast sensitivity figure of 92dB SPL from 1 Watt means they'll give enormous volume from 40 Watts. I listened to these speakers for a few days and they really are very impressive. Perhaps they will be available in Sydney soon. Big Tannoys are sensitive too, so you may well try DC6Ts, but this will not solve your problem I feel. **NK**

Dave Denyer, on behalf of Icon Audio, says –

Harshness is certainly not a trait that I'd associate with the Icon Audio Stereo 40 MkIII so I wonder if it may be revealing shortcomings elsewhere in the system that were masked by the Musical Fidelity. Areas I would investigate are the Rega arm / arm board interface and the speaker cables. Personally, I find the sound of Rega arms to be hard and glassy when mounted on metal or acrylic arm boards, although it think it works superbly in other situations (such as on a Rega turntable).

The Nordost cable is certainly forward in its presentation so while it may have matched the Musical Fidelity it may just be too much with the Icon Audio.

However I do have to agree that the amp may be being massively over-driven: by UK standards 5m x 9m is quite a large room and the 6 ohm Tannoys can present quite an awkward load. I would suggest comparing the sound from the 4 ohm and 8 ohm outputs on the Stereo 40 MkII, as one may sound much better than the other.

If further investigation does indicate that the harshness is due to the amplifier being over driven then there are only two real solutions; a more efficient, and easily driven pair of speakers such as the Epos, or a bigger amplifier. The Icon Audio Stereo 60 MkIII should provide a lot more 'welly' and be within budget if the Stereo 40 MkII is traded in. If you can arrange a home trial of this and the problem remains then it does imply that it is elsewhere.

The Australian distributor is Decibel



Icon Audio Stereo 60 produces more power and will go louder than a Stereo 40.

H-Fi
<http://www.decibelhifi.com.au>
 Tel: +61 07 3344 5756, Contact:
 Brian Maddern

DITTON DELIGHT

I'd just like to say how much I enjoyed Haden Boardman's article in August's issue, about the Celestion Ditton 15 loudspeaker. This took me right back to the late sixties. Having heard my Scout troop chaplain's Grundig system of separates, when such things were just coming into vogue in 1957, I was bowled over by the sound and wanted a hi-fi system of my own. All I could afford was the inexpensive end of Philip's 'Audio Plan' range, which I became fed up with after just a couple of months, although I had to persevere with it until I could afford something better.

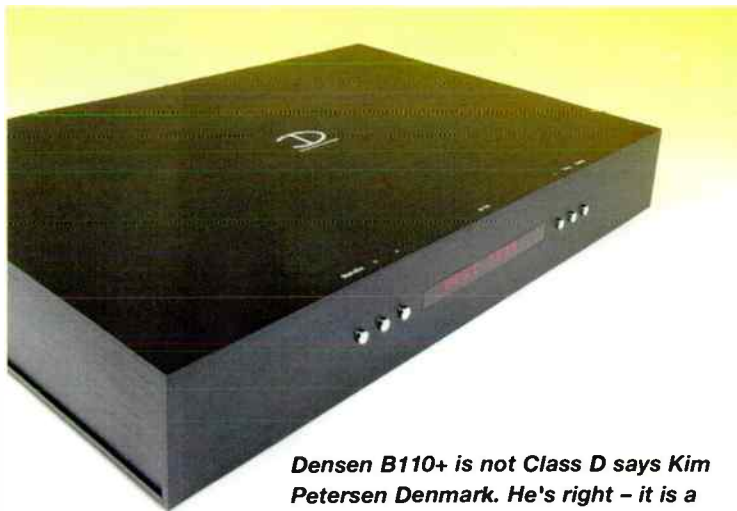
A kind local dealer commiserated, told me the Audio Plan wasn't real hi-fi, and he introduced me to the system

that must have sold in its thousands... An Armstrong 521 amplifier, GL75 turntable with Shure M75 cartridge... and a pair of original Ditton 15s. I was blown away by this system, and it stayed with me until I got into upgrade mode and worked upwards through a range of bigger Dittons, right up to the huge 66. None of them satisfied me like the 15s. Then I discovered Naim, in its infancy at the time, and 40 years later I own their top kit, which constantly thrills me to bits.

Interestingly though, when my wife and I bought a tiny seaside cottage a while back, built in the late 18th century, I decided to re-create the listening experiences of my youth in it. Carefully watching that well known auction site, I gathered exactly the same system I originally had, although it took me three goes to get an Armstrong in truly mint condition. It's fascinating to listen to the system that got me into a lifetime's love



Celestion Ditton article by Haden Boardman took Mike Kent back to the 1960s.



Denon B110+ is not Class D says Kim Petersen Denmark. He's right – it is a Class AB, but it measured like a D.

of hi-fi and good musical reproduction, and though a world away from what the Naim kit achieves, those ubiquitous Ditton 15s certainly didn't earn their reputation for nothing. I wonder if any bits of Philip's Audio Plan still exist out there....

Yours sincerely,
Mike Kent

DENSEN DELIBERATION

In Hi-Fi World February 2012 Tony Bolton reviews the Denon B-110+ integrated amplifier alongside the Audiolab 8200A. The B-110+ is several times referred to as being a Class D amplifier, and the conclusion mentions that it doesn't quite sound like that, quote "Unlike a number of Class D amplifiers it was eminently 'listenable' and enjoyable, with little sign of digital 'screech' or hardness common with such amplifiers".

This is highly understandable as the B-110+ is indeed not a Class D amplifier :-). In fact, Denon doesn't make amplifiers with Class D technology, which the owner Thomas Sillesen has also commented on a Danish hi-fi forum.

How did you (Tony Bolton) get the impression that the B-110+ is Class D? I don't think this has been discussed yet, in later issues, but I might of course have overlooked it – in that case I apologize for the inconvenience.

Thanks for a great magazine, and please continue the focus on vinyl - it simply is more fun :-)

Best regards,
**Kim Petersen
Denmark**

Yes, you are right Kim. We got the impression it was Class D because it measured like one – which is to say, not very well. And it stayed cool. Most Class Ds suffer violent changes of transfer function, modulating their distortion pattern severely and this is what the review sample B-110+ did on the test bench.

The B-175 reviewed in this issue,

by way of contrast, was completely stable in its distortion pattern. As they likely use the same Class AB output stage configuration it may be that our B-110+ was a bad sample as the differences between them are peculiar. **NK**

LONG ARM

I am putting together my dream hi-fi system and so far I have purchased a brand new pair of B&W 802 Diamonds (still in their boxes) and an Amazon Referenz Turntable. I have decided on a Graham Phantom II Supreme B-44 tonearm but I am confused about arm



The Amazon Reference turntable will accept arms up to 12in long. Should I use a 9in or 10in Graham Phantom II Supreme B-44 tonearm, asks John Williams?

lengths. What do you recommend for this turntable?

At this stage I am thinking Sutherland Hubble or Carey PH302Mk2 phono stage. I was after an Ortofon A90 cartridge but I think they are impossible to find now so I am thinking Koetsu Onyx or Coralstone, Vitus Audio SCD-101 or Wadia 580sei.

Plinius Tauto pre amp. either 2x Plinius RefA Power Amps or I can get 2x ex Demo Cary FA500-1 Mono Blocs.

I haven't heard the Cary mono

blocs but I have heard the Plinius gear over several hours at my friends place. He has a Wadia 380Se playing through a Tauto into a RefA into a pair of new Matin Logan Electrostatics. Simply stunning sound. Playing XRCDs through this system via that Wadia was amazing. I couldn't believe a CD player was capable of producing that sort of quality. He also has an Amazon 2 with a Moersch tonearm and a Sutherland PHD phono stage. I don't know what the cartridge is but it is a German MC.

There is something else I have learnt through my friends system and that is what a difference there is between cables. Over the past 4-5 months we have played around with a lot of different brands and price brackets of interconnects. In both RCA and XLR. I must admit I was a disbeliever and sceptic in the beginning. But not any more: I was amazed at the differences between brands and sometimes between types within the same brands. We even did blindfold testing so we couldn't cheat.

For his system Nordost came out a clear winner every time. It has made me think twice about cables and I will be doing exhaustive testing with my system when I get it all together before I purchase any cables. The past few months have taught me a very valuable lesson. Your interconnects and speaker

cables can make or break your system no matter whether it's a budget hi-fi or a dream h-fi system. So be careful and try several before you buy for your system. They really do make that much of a difference.

Cheers,
**John Williams
Auckland
New Zealand**

Longer arms reduce tracking error and the distortion that arises from

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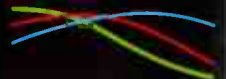
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Neville Roberts HI FI World Feb 2010



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Dealer and distributor enquiries welcome. For a full range of upgrades and accessories, interconnects or speaker cables please email info@isokinetik.co.uk or call 0208 241 8890 www.isokinetik.co.uk



The Graham Phantom II Supreme B-44 tonearm that attracts John Williams.

it. However, they are usually less stiff than short arms. Sonically, I find long arms in general sound smooth and rich, whilst short arms sound fast and grippy. As the Phantom comes in 9in and 10in lengths I am unsure how different they will sound, as the length difference isn't great and I have not heard them. Personally, I'd go for the 10in, because I swapped to a 12in SME long, long ago and prefer a long arm. They are also a bit weightier of course (i.e. higher effective mass at the headshell) and better suit MC cartridges, rather than compliant MMs. I hope that helps. **NK**

ON TRACK

I am a little confused by Dave Clewlow's letter re the setting up of an SMEV tonearm. I use an SMEV on my Garrard 401, I also use the Hi-Fi News test disc. As far as I'm aware, the 18dB tone is a setting for bias compensation and all the trackability bands are at 15dB which he mentions later in the letter.

After working my way through endless protractors, I now only use the Clearaudio gauge on the 65mm setting which Clearaudio recommend and this gives superb results with my Denon DL304 cartridge. When listening for tracking errors I always listen via headphones.

With respect to bias, don't rely on the dial setting, always set the bias using the 16dB (Band 8 on the disc). This will help trackability. The 18dB bias setting cannot be reproduced cleanly. Also I am not convinced that the test tones on the producers cut version have been cut cleanly, they seem to be much better on the first generation (blue cover) version of the disc.

Regards,

Michael Bickley

GET IT STRAIGHT

I would like you to help me sort out a problem I put myself into with buying a new cartridge for probably outdated turntable and tonearm, i.e. a Benz Micro Ace SL for a Thorens TD 160 super with Mayware Formula IV tone arm that I bought second hand some

years ago when I wanted to listen to my vinyl records collection again. I have to say that I am in fact very happy with the sound of the new cartridge compared to the Goldring Eroica that was originally fitted with the Mayware, and even compared with my CD player. But I am nonetheless worried that this arm would be too light for the Benz, even with the optimum settings (the Mayware is a variable mass design), and would be bettered by a more recent device anyway. Could you recommend an arm that would be good enough for the cartridge and allow me a possible turntable upgrade in the future? I thought of a Jelco 750, or maybe a Moerch UP 4, which is also an unipivot but with a possibility to choose between different mass arm wands. What do you think?

Main system: Marantz CD 14 and PM 14, Kef Reference Two.

Thanks in advance,

**Marc Lucas
Liège
Belgium**

The straight tube 250T Jelco is far more rigid than the S tube arms. However, with a Benz Micro Ace SL a Rega RB301 arm would be a better

for some idea on how to move forward here, or you could just get an RB7001000, according to budget. Standard Regas work very well and tuned ones give great results and are fine value.

NK

MOVING UP

I have a Rega P3-24 with TT-PSU and since then I have upgraded the Elys cartridge to Goldring 1022 and managed to find a Quad QC24P for a bargain price which solved my phono stage dilemma. Both upgrades have been significant improvements and I am really enjoying my vinyl. But I have been bitten by the upgrade bug and as much as I am enjoying it I can't help feeling that I am just starting to glimpse the potential of the format and want to see how much further it can go.

Previous advice you gave was on a logical upgrade path - part of which I have now done as above. The next step is either to upgrade the arm or possibly to wait a little longer and upgrade the turntable. So my questions are;

1) Which will make the most difference - an upgraded turntable (say Gyro-Dec level) with the RB301 off my current



An Audiomods Rega arm would suit the Thorens TD160 turntable of Marc Lucas.

choice I feel. It's rigid, one piece construction, standard dimensions and light weight make it suitable for the TD160, and it suits the Benz too. Look at the Audiomods Regas

deck or an improved arm (possibly Audiomods, Audio Origami, Origin Live or Inspire) on my current P3 - budget demands that upgrades will be staggered.

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"Magny Cours" room
at Whittlebury Hall

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The New Stereo 40 MK III KT88m Our best ever mid range amplifier!



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Superbly engineered. Very versatile 40w + 40w

Whilst our flagship models rightly get superb praise from reviewers worldwide for their performance and value, we never lose focus on our more affordable products and regularly update them when the opportunity arises. Such is the case with our Stereo 40. Our original brief over 10 years ago to make the best possible EL34/KT88 valve amplifier for a reasonable price still holds true. Our latest Stereo 40 MK III m incorporates several improvements. Now with a meter which allows a very simple way to check that the output valves are operating at their optimum value and best performance. This will also tell you when a valve is due for replacement or when it is failing. Something other designs don't do. The Stereo 40 is almost unique in its ability to use a very wide range of valves including 6L6, 5881, EL34, 6CA7, KT66, KT77, 6550, KT88. Now made very easy to change if you like "tube rolling".

In our quest to make the best amplifier in its class we also include all the features we think a good amplifier should have including Triode or Ultralinear operation, remote control, a record loop, a warm up/standby facility, valve rectifier, Low Distortion Tertiary output transformers and many more features.

There are also things we don't include like printed circuit boards and transistors both of which we feel degrade the performance of valve amplifiers. Obviously the overriding priority is the sound quality which must come from good engineering which we believe to be far ahead of the Stereo 40's modest price. We guarantee you will not be disappointed!

Our four cornerstones are **Quality Performance and Value**. And in the future, **Service** when you need it. In this age of "built in obsolescence" it may be unfashionable to talk about repairs and spares but our commitment to future service means you should be able to enjoy your amplifier for at least 20 years.

All of our amplifiers are designed and finished in Leicester they are commissioned and serviced by the people that designed them so you can be sure of our quality control and long term performance. Our new series of "Low Distortion Tertiary" output transformers are the best we have ever made, enabling us to reduce global feedback by about 40%. All our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It also allows for easy servicing, upgrades and modifications. Remote controlled volume is useful for fine tuning your listening level to match your taste. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated PTFE audio cable SCR capacitors audiophile resistors. Power Amplifier operation is possible by selecting a lower "gain" on the rear of the amplifier (this is done without attenuation which would lose quality). Loudspeakers of nominal impedance between 3 ohms and 10 ohms may be used with virtually no reduction in power or quality. A valve rectifier with choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone are unable to do. Tape and other methods of recording and playback are catered for by the "Tape Monitor". Also useful for Home Cinema applications.

In short we have created an amplifier of excellent flexibility and quality which retains the qualities of traditional design and performance.

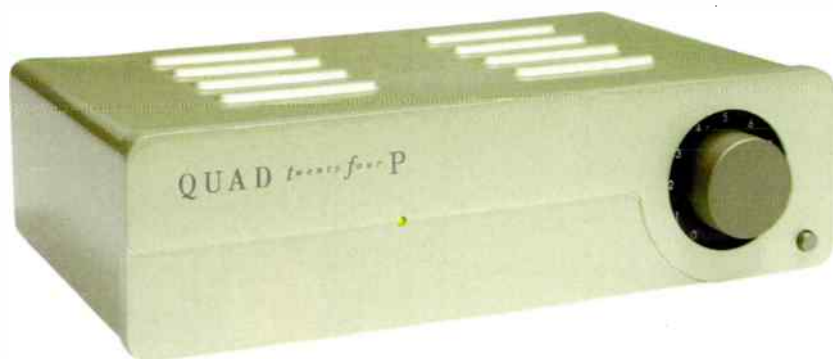
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I have upgraded to a Quad QC24P phono stage says Bob Smythe. What turntable should I get?

2) Of the arms mentioned have you any advice on their respective characteristics because I assume it may not be possible to audition them as many are made to order? Are there other arms I should consider and what sort of level should I be looking at to match up with a potential turntable upgrade (see below)

3) At least turntables should be possible to audition. I have always been interested in a Gyro-Dec, but Nottingham Analogue and Origin Live also look interesting. A realistic budget is £1,500 to £2,000 for the turntable but I am also interested in any other decks you think really should at least be auditioned because if the improvements are big enough, I would prefer to wait and buy the best I can.

The intention is for the arm and turntable upgrades to be definitive ones in my system. I may revisit cartridges again at some point but I would like to find my final arm and turntable and ideally for them to be well matched even though I will have to do them separately so there will be perhaps a significant period where there may be more of a mismatch so advice on what to consider and which is best to upgrade first would be much appreciated.

Many thanks,
Bob Smythe

The Quad QC24P is a fine phono stage that will carry you through several upgrades in the future. It will handle any moving coil cartridge you can think of.

A few years ago I fitted a 12" Jelco arm to a GyroDec and it was reviewed in this magazine in the April 2010 issue. It sounded very good and but my thoughts were that an SME IV might have been more suitable. They do make a great combination as I later discovered. I found late night use a bit of a problem after two glasses of wine, the suspended deck is very suspended! You could easily fit your RB301 until you can afford a SME IV. I don't think you would regret this decision.

Or you could consider a Technics

SL-1200, the Funk Platter and the Timestep PSU. If you get a good used one from eBay or a dealer you will find the original arm is really quite good, at least until you can go for the SME 309 as used on the Technics EVO reviewed in the July 2011 issue of Hi-Fi World.

You haven't asked about a cartridge. Get a Benz Glider or, if you can afford it, a Transfiguration Axia would go well with any of the above. Good luck and let us know what you decided?

Dave Cawley
Sound Hi-Fi

OPENLY BAFLED

I have been attempting to match a pair of differing impedance loudspeakers to produce a balanced musical reproduction. On my baffle, measuring about 33 inches square I have centrally mounted a 12 inch Wharfedale Bass Unit (3010 102.04) of 6 Ohms impedance (ex Dovedale duty and many other branded enclosures), and slightly offset above it a Wharfedale Super 8RSDD of 10-15 ohms impedance. Simply wired together in Series with no intervening crossovers, etc.

My power amplifier gives either a 4 ohms or 8 ohms output impedance and to my ear the 8 ohms setting sounds the more balanced. Because of the difference in impedance and power handling capacities (20 watts and 6 watts respectively from their seventies specs.) should I be considering some adjusting circuitry, perhaps in front of the 8 inch unit, to ensure a better integration between them? If anything the Super 8 can be a trifle excitable or hard pressed at times.

Any advice gratefully received along with a small diagram with values as appropriate.

Usual thanks for all you do in the World of Hi-Fi.

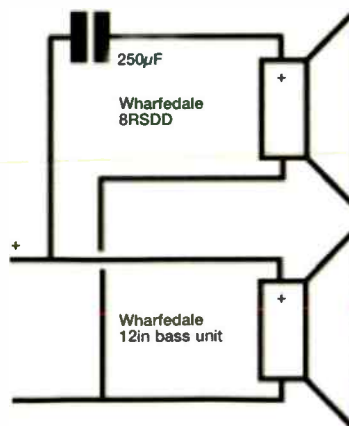
Regards,
Adrian Warwick
UK

Er – yes, this isn't how loudspeakers are designed Adrian! Connecting the drivers in series will limit the power developed into them and cancel

electrical damping, which you need on an open baffle where acoustic damping is non-existent. The usual arrangement is to run drive units in parallel, with the bass unit connected to the amplifier through a low-pass inductor and the treble unit through a high-pass capacitor – see the circuit diagram.

In your case I suggest you connect the bass unit direct, as it will not need a low pass I suspect. To cross over at 200Hz to the 8RSDD you need to use around 100µF, using a bi-polar electrolytic. Or you may just not bother and let the 8RSDD run full range. I suspect the 12in bass unit will have far higher output than the 8RSDD, meaning bass will be excessive. However, balancing this is small baffle size of 33in, which will cancel bass progressively below 200Hz.

It's all a bit of a hotchpotch technically and I suspect you will end up with little low bass, plentiful high bass and recessed midband and treble. Increasing baffle size or placing it on a floor / against a side wall are tricks used to lift lower bass by increasing baffle area. There's nothing you can do to reduce output from the 12in bass unit to match the 8RSDD other than insert low value resistors of a few ohms, but this will destroy electrical damping again. If the 8RSDD is very sensitive though, I may be wrong and the two drivers will match. It's best to experiment and see. Have fun! **NK**



This is how a two-way loudspeaker is configured. It may not be the best way to marry a Wharfedale 12in bass unit to a Wharfedale 8RSDD.

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New wireless

Sony fight for their place in AV with the new STR-DN1030 receiver. As affordable receivers go, Martin Pipe thinks it's a good one.



Regular Hi-Fi World readers can be forgiven for believing that Onkyo has the monopoly on affordable multichannel AV receivers. Denon, Marantz and Pioneer also make product; it's just that the Onkyo models have the edge in sound quality, potential and functionality. Turn to the hot(ish) sub-£500 sector of the market, though, and a surprise contender is lurking in the wings.

Sony was once a heavyweight in the world of 'everyman' hi-fi; some of its more esoteric audiophile ranges of the past command respect to this day. The corporation has, alas, pulled out of two-channel hi-fi as we know it. A recent trade presentation day revealed no (SA)CD players, amplifiers, recorders or speakers. In their place were endless mini-systems, soundbars and other mass-market fodder, replete with obligatory iThing compatibility.

Sony does, however, still manufacture multichannel AV receivers ranging in price from £350 to £2000. It's a travesty that none were on show to journalists that day. One of its newer contenders,

pitched towards the lower end of that scale, is the £470 STR-DN1030. As one might expect from today's Sony, this 7.2-capable AVR is packed to the gunnels with all manner of clever digital facilities and their accompanying acronyms, online trickery and of course support for various Apple standards.

All key surround audio codecs and formats are supported. They include the 24bit DTS-HD/Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD systems that underpin Blu-ray, as well as more established ones like DTS-ES 6.1, Dolby Digital and even DTS 96/24. The STR-DN1030 is also ready for multichannel AAC, as used by terrestrial HD broadcasting.

For surround-sound from matrix or 2-channel sources we have Dolby Pro-Logic II (with the 'z' synthesised height channel, if you've installed the necessary speakers), Sony's proprietary HD-DCS soundfield mode, DTS Neo6 and a brace of venue-simulating DSPs. What a pity there's no SQ mode for those old quad LPs (or CDs mastered from the same tapes). As a 7.2 design, the STR-DN1030 supports the line-level connection of two subwoofers; one

of these large boxes should suffice in the average living room.

For two-channel audio, there's a reasonably-effective 'analogue direct' mode. Sony tell me that the selected analogue source (there are five of these, plus a RDS-capable FM/AM tuner with 60 memory presets in total, but no multichannel input) is fed to the front left/right power amps via an electronic volume control, instead of being converted to digital, manipulated via DSP and then converted back into analogue for amplification. Leave this mode engaged, though, and you'll be greeted by confusing silence if a multichannel source is selected – a design flaw I feel. No-sound scenarios are strictly avoided in design, because they unsettle users.

All analogue sources are line-level; there's no RIAA-equalised MM phono input. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as you can use the external phono stage of your choice. Still, on the subject of analogue matters, the seven 140W RMS power amps are built around specially-designed 'wideband metalcore modules', which drive conventional transistor pairs. The circuitry is of conventional Class

AB design, rather than the PWM/Class D variety that is slowly making multichannel inroads. They connect to your speakers via decent binding-post terminals, which will also accept banana plugs.

With a complex and often unintuitive user-interface that involves a intimidatingly-busy handset (a 'shift' button is needed for certain functions) these speakers can be configured for 7.1 use (back-surround or height), or conventional 5.1 with bi-amped front channels. The STR-DN1030 has a 'zone 2' function with independent source selection, but this is only available with a line-level output. What a pity that Sony doesn't allow the two spare channels to be used here. The linear power supply that sustains all this circuitry is built around two custom-made 10,000uF electrolytic capacitors and a large mains transformer.

Digitally speaking, there are five HDMI ports with 3D passthrough – which is somewhat lacking, considering that some offer as many as eight. What a pity that Sony hasn't taken a leaf out of the Onkyo book and provided HDMI connectivity on the front-panel for camcorders. All you get is a USB port, low quality composite video and stereo audio – and USB only reads low quality compressed audio like MP3, not high quality WAV.

In terms of more conventional digital inputs, the STR-DN1030 gives you an electrical (phono socket) S/PDIF input and two optical ports.

A separate menu enables the inputs to be customised; there are two component-video inputs and two composite video inputs on the rear panel, which are usefully converted into HDMI with circuitry bought in from Faroudja thereby eliminating the need to run multiple cables from the receiver to your display. An analogue video input – but alas not HDMI, to the chagrin of SkyHD subscribers – can be combined with one of the digital audio inputs if desired.

ROOM TUNE

As with many rival AVRs, the STR-DN1030 will room-tune the audio channels automatically – in this case with a system known as 'DCAC'.

A microphone, plugged into the front panel, is seated in the listening position. A series of staccato pulses are then sent to your speakers, enabling the receiver's DSP circuitry (based around a 32-bit SHARC chip running at 350MHz) to 'sound out' your room and apply the necessary corrections. It will even compensate for phase errors (such as incorrectly-connected speakers). DCAC worked

surprisingly well, but some manual 'tweaks' enable optimal results to be obtained.

Online playback – internet radio, access to a music portal (a bit like a proprietary Spotify in this case, only nowhere as good) and the ability to pull tracks from network servers – has until now required you to snake an Ethernet cable between the back of the receiver and a spare port on your router. Thanks to its onboard wi-fi transceiver, though, the STR-DN1030 does away with all that (although Ethernet is retained for those who have no alternative).

A compressed-music enhancer is built in, but this can muddy the sound quite noticeably.

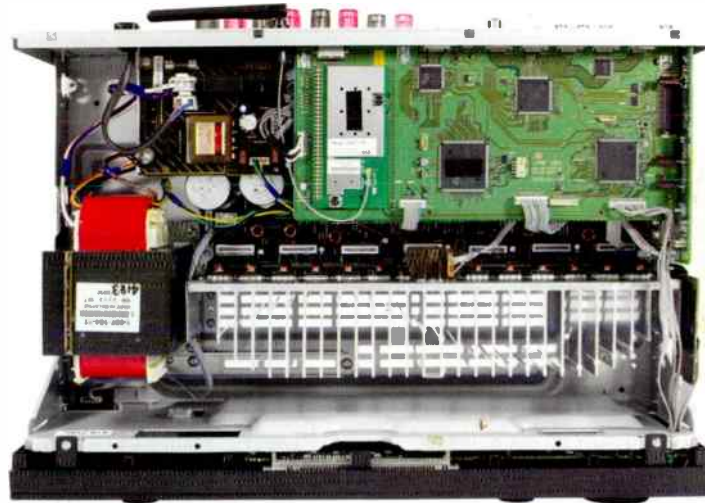
The wi-fi connectivity and onboard media player are compatible with Apple's AirPlay, ensuring your iTunes library can be streamed to the STR-DN1030. That aforementioned USB port will accept iPhones and iPods, enabling their contents to be played. The receiver's onscreen user interface will select tracks on such devices. FAT or FAT32 formatted USB storage devices containing music are also fair game. Only audio content

successfully. Thanks to AAC support, I was able to play BBC Radio 3 HD broadcasts captured with the free get_oplayer utility; another free program (FLVExtract) is used to strip the 320kbps AAC audio streams from the downloaded files.

Even compared to live FM radio, the sound quality from these is nothing short of phenomenal in terms of clarity, imaging and sheer detail. However, even with a wired network there were streaming issues. The music would occasionally abruptly stop, and – if I was lucky – resume. Equally annoyingly, cue/review isn't supported and so you have no choice but to wait until the desired section of a long passage arrives. iPod playback does thankfully give you this function, together with the others (track/album selection, shuffle and so on) that Apple has seen fit to build into its players.

SOUND QUALITY

The FM radio section may be a budget-priced 'module', but with high-quality material like the Beeb's Prom concerts it pulled way above its



Big heatsinks, but Sony's 'wideband metalcore module' Class AB amps ran just warm.

can be played; video and still-images are not supported. The currently-playing audio can be 'pushed' to compatible Sony products with the STR-DN1030's 'party' mode. Not having such gear to hand, I was not in a position to try it out.

Nor could I get the STR-DN1030 to play media stored on FAT32-formatted USB sticks. Yet the USB port worked perfectly well with an iPod, and the same files – copied across to a Netgear NAS with onboard DLNA server - played without issue in network mode. WAV (PCM, not DTS 5.1), AAC, MP3 and even FLAC content was all handled

weight with an open soundstage and impressive detail. It's not as sensitive as my Sony 730ES – a high-end synthesised tuner from yesteryear – but much of this vintage unit's presentation is retained. With the Rogers GS6/GSS/C33/ASB60 speaker system, though, the sonic character of this receiver was on the bright side – from all sources, and not just FM. In 'analogue direct' mode, there's little you can do about this. If you're prepared to leave the DSP switched in, though, the simple bass/treble controls allow the brightness to be tamed – at the expense of some transparency.

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Based on the multi-award winning Series V pick-up arm, the Series V-12 incorporates the same design and engineering that have made SME a byword for excellence. Coherent musical control is held over the entire frequency range in terms of tonal quality, stability and stereo imaging. Startling dynamic range, neutrality, structurally inert, the Series V-12 embodies every worthwhile feature in a pick-up arm. The 12 inch tone-arm is pressure die-cast in magnesium complete with an integrated headshell to eliminate tone-arm resonances in the audio spectrum and offers a 27% reduction in maximum angular error distortion over 9 inch models. Listening, the benefits of minimal tracking error and harmonic distortion are clearly revealed.



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HI-FI WORLD on Rega arm mods

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HI-FI WORLD on Rega structural Mod

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Internal Rewiring - £77

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Internet radio can also satisfy, although some stations sound much better than others – as with locally-streamed files, it's a matter of how well they have been encoded! Unfortunately, you have no control over the stations available.

Turning to disc replay, I hitched a Cambridge Azur 751BD universal player to one of the HDMI ports. The first disc onto the tray was Mahler's 5th Symphony (DG, Claudio Abbado/Berlin Philharmonic). This is a multichannel SACD. Might the STR-DN1030 be able to cope with the DSD encoding developed in part by Sony? Alas not. SACD loyalists will need to set their player to PCM output.

Not that you'd tell with the DG disc, as it actually carries PCM rather than DSD. Regardless of such considerations, the Mahler came across well. For a receiver without hi-fi pretensions, the STR-DN1030 proved to be more musically-involving than expected. Instrument groups can be positioned with a fair degree of precision. The bright character of the receiver certainly complemented the brass instruments that permeate the funereal Trauermarsch. This DG disc does not particularly-stretch the rear channels, which are instead used primarily to recreate venue ambience.



A wi-fi aerial and ethernet socket (top right) provide network connection.

Switching to another SACD, the DSD-encoded Dark Side of the Moon, and all channels are given a workout. At reasonably-high volume levels, though, some unpleasant grittiness (notably from the rear channels) spoils the climax of The Great Gig In The Sky. No such problems with our Blu-ray of inventive Ian Dury biopic Sex And Drugs And Rock And Roll. The Sony compellingly handled both the recreated Blockheads-era live pieces, and Chaz Jankel's incidental music. The throaty dialogue that characterises Andy Serkis' portrayal of Dury himself was also articulately-conveyed, with no loss of intelligibility.

CONCLUSION

The STR-DN1030 is more of a movie machine than a particularly-

accurate music reproducer. A spin of Kraftwerk's Tour de France Soundtracks CD shows it lacks the absolute foot-tapping (or should that be 'pedalling?') rhythmic pacing that you'll get from a decent budget integrated amp. But for all that, this Sony is not a bad compromise; it certainly paints an enjoyable portrait of the music. Few AV receivers of any price, it must be remembered, can claim to be a jack of all trades.

Rather more criticism can be aimed at the user interface, which is fairly unresponsive and difficult to get on with. The media player fails to even approach the flexibility or usability of, say, an A.C. Ryan budget model; track navigation, in particular, is dire. For the money, though, the STR-DN1030 is well worth considering if you're after one box for both movies and music.

VERDICT ●●●●

Best with movie soundtracks, the STR-DN1030 is acceptable with music. It is let down by dubious ergonomics and a limited media player.

SONY STR-DN1030 £470

Sony

+44 (0)844 8466 555

www.sony.co.uk

- FOR**
- wireless connectivity
 - good FM radio
 - many features
- AGAINST**
- mediocre user interface
 - low USB quality
 - no spare amps for Zone 2

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The STR-DN1030 produced 112 Watts per channel into 8 Ohms, one channel driven, rising to 170 Watts into 4 Ohms – enough to achieve good volume levels even with insensitive small loudspeakers. Distortion levels were low, even at 10kHz into a low 4 Ohm load. Only close to full output at 10kHz did distortion rise to 0.1%, mostly crossover.

Frequency response was very wide, as Sony claim, starting to fall slowly above 100kHz. The Aux input was insensitive, 470mV being needed for full output. This will be a drawback with low gain external phono stages.

The S/PDIF electrical input handled sampling rates to 192kHz and had an analogue bandwidth to 45kHz (-3dB), but the optical input handled 176.4kHz sample rate maximum, not 192kHz. Linearity was not as good as possible, with 16bit/44.1 (CD quality) measuring 0.35% at -60dB when 0.22% is normal, and 96kHz sample rate 0.54% – a high value. As 44.1 and multiples gave less distortion than 48kHz and multiples the basic clock was 44.1 it appears, with poor sample rate conversion.

With 24bit resolution distortion at -60dB was relatively high at 0.2%, compared to 0.04% or so that is common. Receivers from Marantz and Onkyo manage better figures.

HDMI gave similar results to S/PDIF, with an analogue bandwidth to 45kHz (-3dB) with 192kHz sample rate and distortion of 0.2% with a 24bit signal, but there were a lot of non-harmonic quantisation products that when measured as THD+N amounted to 1.2% distortion. So HDMI was not especially clean.

The VHF/FM tuner was very linear, producing little distortion at 0.07%. In full quieting hiss was a little on the high side at -64dB but this won't be noticeable in use, except possibly as a very slight hiss during Radio 3 silences if volume is up. Frequency response was flat to 9kHz (-1dB) and then rolled down above 12kHz due to the 19kHz pilot tone filter so the tuner will sound tonally even, neither dull nor sharp. Full quieting was achieved at 0.4mV, a very low value meaning little signal is needed to achieve minimum hiss. Stereo sensitivity was 48µV for -50dB noise level, a fair result.

USB would not play WAV test files; it plays only compressed MP3, AAC and WMA, intended for portables. It does not read Mac HFS or PC NTFS file structures, only FAT32.

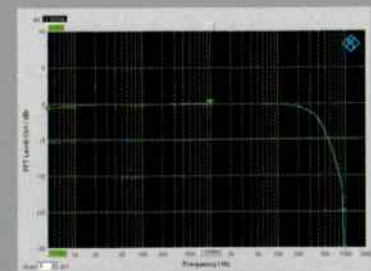
The STR-DN1030 measured fairly well all round. Although it offers a huge array of features at a low price, there has been no serious cost cutting, measurement shows, but at the same time better results are possible. NK

Power	112watts
Frequency response	2Hz-110kHz
Separation	89dB
Noise	-97dB
Distortion	0.05%
Sensitivity	470mV

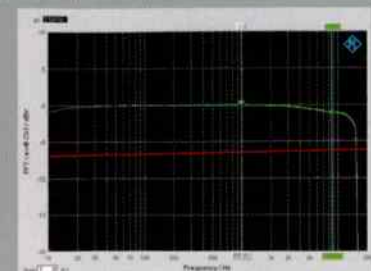
S/PDIF & HDMI, 192kHz sample rate	
Frequency response	10Hz-45kHz
Distortion (-60dB, 24bit)	0.2%

VHF/FM	
Frequency response	10Hz-4kHz
Stereo separation	53dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.07%
Hiss (CCIR)	-64dB
Signal for minimum hiss	650µV
Sensitivity, stereo	48µV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE S/PDIF 24/192



FREQUENCY RESPONSE VHF/FM



Style master

Packing a lot into a small space but doing it in style, Paul Rigby reviews Densen's new B-175 integrated amplifier.

Back in 1992, Densen released its first amplifier, the DM10. "When that arrived, it cost around £1600" said Thomas Sillesen, founder of Densen. "That was a huge price for an integrated. One of the most expensive of its type at the time. Twenty years later, we wanted to make another, top of the line, integrated. You don't sell truck loads of integrations at this price so we partly made the B-175 just for fun."

That wasn't the principle reason for creating the new amplifier, of course, there were practical reasons too. "There are a lot of users who want a good amplifier but don't want a large footprint. It's a small machine on the outside but big on the inside. It's the antithesis of those big American amplifiers you often see. There are also some customers

who live differently, they have a more minimalistic design. A larger system will take over the room. We can supply pre and powers for those who want it though," said Sillesen.

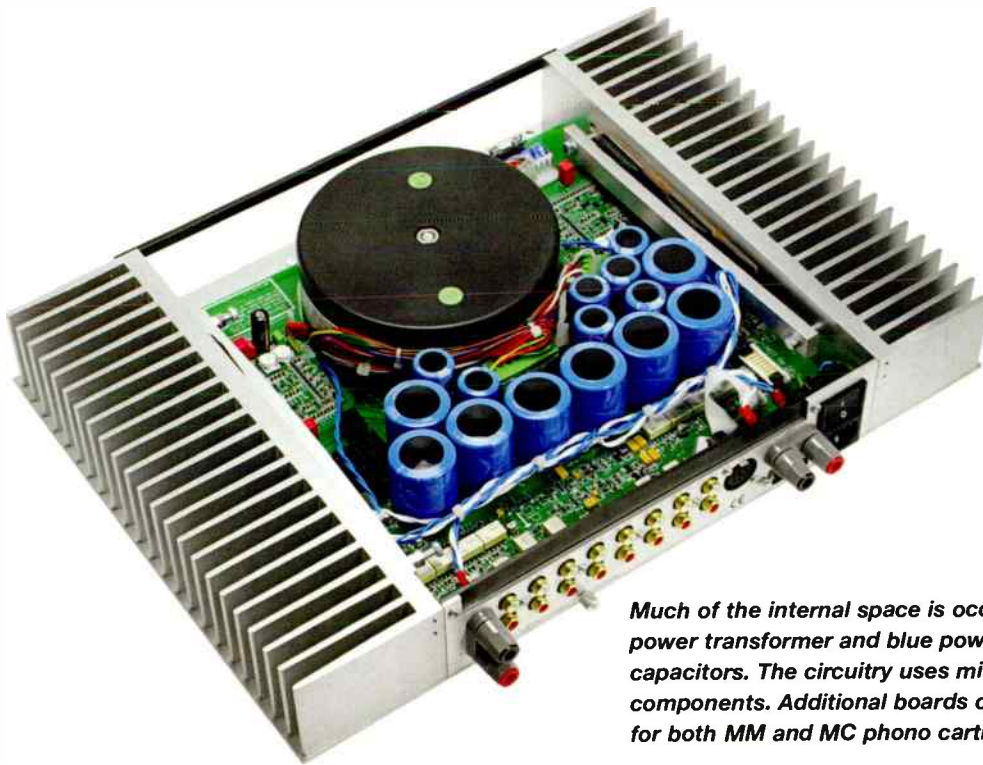
Speaking of pre and powers, the B-175, offering 125W of power and available in albino (natural brushed aluminium) or black, is forged from respected Densen technologies; you will find a combination of the B-250 pre and a slice of the B-330 power amp plus the B-350 monoblocks within its 440x310x64mm sized, 16kg chassis. There were challenges when merging these technologies, though, "Such as the interference between the power and pre amps and achieving a good design in such a small space. Each channel is surface mounted so each power amplifier is the size of a credit card. Hence, the circuitry is squeezed but that has the benefit that you can make

the circuitry faster. There's less radio interference in this way."

Despite the lack of space, Densen has been careful about isolation. Even in terms of how the toroidal power supply is oriented has had an effect. Densen engineers have measured the noise floor when the power supply was installed, twisting the transformer to find the lowest reading.

There is also a brief hark back to the original DM10. "The wires used internally are copper with silver coating and Teflon isolation. We used these cables back in the DM10. New old stock," said Sillesen. And as for those who scream that pre and power separates are the audiophile route, Sillesen has strong views on that. "If you look at performance, I don't think there is a compromise. The alternatives would be a pre and two monoblocks which





Much of the internal space is occupied by a toroidal power transformer and blue power supply smoothing capacitors. The circuitry uses miniature 'surface mount' components. Additional boards can be inserted to cater for both MM and MC phono cartridges.

would end up costing £7,500 or more. In that respect, the separates are far more expensive."

One interesting point of the design is the lack of a variable resistor; potentiometer-based volume control, a widely used, common choice for many hi-fi components. Trouble is, it never performs very well at low volume, only at full volume. It also produces a channel imbalance at low volumes, "ALPS produce the most well known system which we also use, the RK-27, so do Naim. Although we have since tweaked our supply because it's not precise at low level. On the B-175, we use a precise attenuator, which only has one resistor in the signal path at any one time, making it effective but simple. There is also a far greater choice of resistors in this system now than there used to be to truly make this system usable. We have utilised a remote-friendly, 200-step, system controlled by a microprocessor. It's an example of our no-compromise approach," said Sillesen.

Externally, the recessed heat sinks add a touch of class, although the initial reason wasn't aesthetics but efficiency, "When you cut a heat sink you normally have to brush it to make it look nice. Done in this way, you don't have to because they are covered which makes the amp cost efficient while still looking nice," said Sillesen.

The Densen also offers 5.1 and 7.1 channel surround sound preamp options via an internal board under as an optional extra. Densen supply

a value-for-money SP-01 board for £300 while the better sounding, more refined SP-02 is £800.

You can also buy a separate Moving Magnet phono amp plug-in card (£150) or a DIP switch-controlled, dual Moving/Moving Coil board for £225. The phono boards replace the Line I input which demands that you move two jumpers to effect the Line I to phono board transformation. The cards are normally a dealer fit but the operation is a simple one for any DIY fan or those who are used to inserting boards into the back of their PC computer.

If you don't want to use the surround slot for surround hardware and you have no need for the MM phono card then you will have

and only one pair of loudspeaker outputs, so bi-wiring requires special cables.

SOUND QUALITY

Comparing the Densen to my reference system, especially the bass dominant Icon Audio MB845 Mk.II monoblocks, was an enlightening experience. On the question of those lower frequencies, the Icons projected a big, dominating bass front that allowed percussion and bass guitar to have a full part in the rhythmic portion of the mix. What I didn't expect, was to hear the Densen place bass in a similarly important position. OK, the Densen is a solid state machine so what's so newsworthy about that? Because of how the Densen implements

"it did provide, however, both air and space that allowed the mids and treble to breath easily, providing more room for the music to manoeuvre"

available room and power to install a plug-in DAC. Called the Fabel DAC (£350), it was only introduced at the recent Munich show. It supports 24bit/192kHz via an S/PDIF electrical input.

An external power supply can be added and an electronic crossover is an option too.

There is no headphone socket

the lower frequencies. Some solid state amps create a Godzilla-like bass performance that not only unbalances the overall presentation but also imposes itself, leaking like ink on blotting paper, into the midrange and treble. Here, the Densen bass stood its ground. It knew its place and only infused its rich, powerful bass response where you wanted

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All inputs are through phono sockets; there are no balanced XLR inputs. A main power switch sits above the IEC mains socket.

and expected it. While retaining a sense of discipline, it still managed to provide a punch on drums and a rhythmic personality.

Midrange and treble were left alone. For the latter, the Densen was noticeably fleet of foot, juggling the often complex arrangements of the prog rock track from King Crimson, 'Three Of A Perfect Pair', with an almost joyous lyricism. In terms of soundstage, the Densen didn't have quite the same sense of maturity of placement as the more expensive Icons. What it did provide, however, was both air and space that allowed the mids and treble to breath easily, providing more room for the music to manoeuvre.

In many ways, comparing the Densen to my reference system was unfair. After all, the B-175 was half the price of my own pre/power combo. The challenge for the Densen, however, was to see how close it could get to the reference sound. For example, on the 'Chet Baker Sings' jazz album, the Densen could easily match the reference's 3D soundstage effect. The sense of depth and distance within the Densen soundstage was very impressive. This was further accentuated by the sense of space within the mix, a separation that very few, if any, integrated models can match. While the Baker vocal might not have had the same sense of intimacy produced by my reference, the Densen did perform admirably well for the price point while its emotional insight was second to none.

Moving to the brass instruments, Baker's trumpet had tremendous focus via the Densen and was lithe, sprightly and precise. The grouping of these factors combined to produce toe-tapping musicality that forced my ear to forget that it was listening to a piece of hi-fi.

Shifting to CD and spinning Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism', I

was impressed by the integrated's punch and speed within the lower frequencies. The Densen had an immediacy and directness that demanded attention.

Playing the Horace Silver track, 'Cape Verdean Blues', instrumental separation stood out, providing a catalyst for everything that was to follow. This meant that no information was lost due to clashing sonic elements.

This performance continued through a series of compressed chart CDs. Despite the compression, the vocals sounded both clean and highly focused. The air and space of the amplifier helped to minimise the compressive elements, negating their aggressive nature. Not only was the strident midrange calmed but I now

had the ability to hear individual musicians, such as the Densen's ability to reach into the mix to extract detail.

This had a beneficial effect on complex vocal sequences. Harmonies sounded less like a chaotic mess and more like a jigsaw of interconnecting vocals.

CONCLUSION

Immensely effective in how it extracts and processes musical information, the Densen provided a clean and focused presentation with a penchant for solid bass, a delicate treble and a midrange that was both revealing and informative. The B-175 proves that integrated amplifier designs can compete at this price point.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Densen B-175 produced 162 Watts into 8 Ohms and 272 Watts into 4 Ohms, a lot of power from a compact amplifier that ran only warm after a few minutes at full output. Like the B-110+ tested in our February issue the B-175 has a low damping factor of 17, identical to that of Naim amplifiers. This is still enough to exert good loudspeaker control but it is less than most transistor amps and may well flesh out bass a bit.

Unlike the B-110+, which measured like a Class D amplifier, the Class AB B-175 maintained a steady transfer function, so under all drive and load conditions it produced second and third harmonic distortion in a consistent relationship to one another. A time domain residual showed clearly there were no crossover spikes; upper harmonics were absent - a good result. With distortion levels rising no higher than 0.15% under normal operating conditions (10kHz, 1 Watt, 4 Ohms) the B-175 is adequately linear and should sound clean and clear.

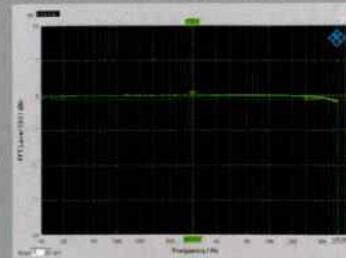
Frequency response measured flat from 1Hz to 100kHz with no change imposed by volume control position or output load.

Input sensitivity was low at 380mV, of consequence when external phono stages of low gain are used, then volume will have to be wound right up. The B-175 is powerful and

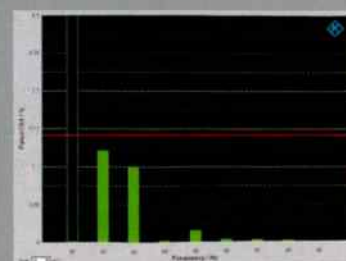
measured consistently well at all power levels so is a well developed design. NK

Power	162watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	1Hz-100kHz
Separation	89dB
Noise	-97dB
Distortion	0.15%
Sensitivity	380mV
Damping factor	17

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



VERDICT

A stylish, minimalist design, the Densen B-175 offers a combination of low frequency power and higher frequency finesse.

DENSEN B-175 £5,500

Kog Audio

+44 (0)2477 220650

www.kogaudio.com

FOR

- sleek design
- clarity
- 3D soundstage
- bass punch

AGAINST

- no balanced inputs
- no headphone output

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Wld Thing



Taking a much more audiophile approach to radio and data sources, Paul Rigby reviews the Sansui WLD+ 201L.

You may remember the WMH-700L which was reviewed in the June issue of *Hi-Fi World*. Within that entertainment centre was a stripped-down version of the WLD+ 201L that you can see here. The latter offering a full size chassis, an upgradable power cable, improved power supply and a higher quality signal path. With the WLD+ 201L, you've got a stand-alone, DAB/DAB+/FM and internet radio with DLNA streaming package. All controllable from the same iPhone app, the free Sansui Libretto, that controls the micro system.

The 201L has a USB port on the front which will take a USB drive but not an iPod because Sansui refused to pay Apple's high license fees. Sansui is aligned to Microsoft, which explains the use of DLNA as the Wi-Fi standard and the adoption of the Microsoft-friendly Frontier Silicon as the controlling chip (instead of the Apple-friendly Broadcom that you often see in Asian-sourced kit).

The lack of Apple support software reduces costs, though. That said, you can still run an iPhone or a iPod Touch on the Sansui, via the Free Media Connect app, allowing both devices to connect with the Sansui via DLNA. This app, like Libretto, is very easy to set-up and configure. Other frontal buttons include tuning, source and volume controls.

On the rear of the 201L, the Sansui has an analogue and optical

out, a removable power cable, Wi-Fi aerial connector (the aerial is supplied), LAN socket, FM/DAB aerial, optical and phono connections.

The Sansui will handle all popular file formats except for Apple Lossless. In terms of sound quality, the internal module can support up to 24bit/48kHz. "Virtually all of the other module-based systems on the market utilise Broadcom, running data files up to 24bit/96kHz," said Paul Mitchell, Sansui UK MD, "But if you think about what people are going to use these things for, if you do want to buy and download 24bit/96kHz files, would you necessarily want to play it on a £300 player which, more than likely, will also have relatively similar priced amp and speakers? Even if you did, would you hear any difference with that spec? It would be different if each component cost £2,500..."

Sansui is looking at future products able to offer a higher bit rate. "The next model up, to be released early next year, will hopefully be 24-bit/192kHz," said Mitchell. "But we want to continue to work with Frontier Silicon. Firstly, because they're Cambridge-based, not US-based and we have a close working relationship. Also, not everyone is using a Mac so the DLNA facility appeals to PC users."

A pleasant surprise is the new OEM software newly announced via Sansui, "One of the things that we're looking to do is to work with the specialist software outfit

dBpoweramp to produce a free Sansui OEM download version to rip your CDs and convert a range of files including Apple Lossless to 16-bit FLAC. We believe that people will be playing stuff that they've already downloaded as MP3s or Apple AAC. The system will play Apple AAC up to 320kbps."

The 201L arrives with a quality remote control that acts as a system remote too, controlling the 201 amp and 201 CD player. The remote can be bought as a stand-alone item. It's a fully featured item as opposed to one of those circuit board-toting after dinner mints that you often see accompanying hi-fi for this price point.

IN USE

Like the mini-system, set-up procedure reflects its careful design and UK origins. The latter is more than welcome. With this home-grown box you will be relieved about three things: the manual has been written in English by an English speaker. In fact, it has been written by the head of Sansui UK himself, Paul Mitchell.

Secondly, the Sansui network connection is a breeze to set up and, in its class, is a model of clarity. If you have a new-ish router with a WPS, push-button security, set-up button (and if you don't, think seriously about purchasing one) then you will not need to fiddle around with dials and hexadecimal key passwords. Just press the WPS button on the

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hub and the WPS button on the Sansui. Simple. If you don't have said router, there are other relatively easy methods to connect to your network.

I was impressed with the speed of the Sansui in amassing my 600-strong library of files. To be honest, I failed to time this feature because I was ready to make a cup of tea while it got on with the job. But, in a just a few seconds, all the files were ready to go.

Finally, although the Sansui is controlled via a text-based, nested menu system accessible via chassis buttons viewed via a small, frontal LED screen, I didn't hate it. This form of interface normally drives me up the wall but, here, the menu tree has been designed by a real person who also hates these interface options. Hence, it's easy to use, down to earth and efficient. This menu design also results from using the Frontier Silicon system in preference to Broadcom.

The Sansui also supports Windows 7's 'Play To' feature. Right click on a music track on your PC and you can instruct the Sansui to play it.

SOUND QUALITY

Starting with the FM radio and, despite some hiss via Radio 3, orchestral work was atmospheric and admirably dynamic, for the price. The operatic vocal delivery infused enough emotion and passion to provide an involving and quite engrossing listen. Radio 4's spoken word output had an amenable texture that, despite a slight hardness, was relatively detailed for the price.

Even via the usual thin presentation of DAB, Radio 4 continued to provide a relatively humanistic grain to the vocal delivery. Upper bass provided a weighty foundation while the mids, although a little strident, were clear and transparent.

Memory stick/USB, WAV-sourcing of a variety of compressed chart CDs provided a neat, tidy and, above all, 3D soundstage effect. The jitter-free solid state data source was transparent and honest in its upper mid translation but, nevertheless, offered enough detail, via my Mordaunt Short speakers, to provide plenty of toe-tapping fun. Bass was surprisingly firm, taught and deep with a low frequency control that belied the price point.

The vocal jazz output of Carol Kidd's 'There Goes My Heart' offered delicate upper mid guitar picking combined with an approachable delivery from Kidd herself that, for the price, was very engaging.

Streaming from my quad-core

PC, the quality of the EAC-ripped chart-based WAV files was surprisingly good. The harsh upper frequencies were calmed, allowing volume to be increased without a threat of bleeding from the ears. Bass was slightly less characterful than the USB memory stick output but, even so, had sufficient heft to provide a driving force that enhanced this track's musicality. For the Carol Kidd track, the upper mids, despite losing a little in depth, were rather more focused.

Playing compressed chart CDs via my iPhone and DLNA, this option was immediately seen as a secondary source. Bass was a little thin and slightly woolly while upper mids were brighter. Sonics improved a tad via the higher quality Carol Kidd vocal jazz WAV. Treble-rich cymbal strikes were lighter and guitar solos were tracked properly. That said, the technology worked well, without a hitch, is useful and convenient.

Moving to internet radio, which was quick to set up and easy to use, the sound quality was either unsurprisingly reasonable or surprisingly good. BBC Radio 3's live performances were little jewels of internet magic. Playing back a 192kHz WMA stream of solo piano, the transmission was notable for its clarity. Silences were admirably black, remarkable considering the technology and the price of the Sansui, while the dreaded bloom that often accompanies piano on any form of radio was minimised in a quite startling manner.

BBC Radio 2, via lower resolution 128kHz WMA, was accompanied by an attendant hiss but the often dynamic nature of the music output minimised the effect

while the sheer musicality of the joyful mids blended easily with the vigour of the bass.

Generally, internet radio output was good. Even the standard (or, rather, sub-standard) 128kbps MP3 files sounded acceptable. Def Leppard pumped out via Classic Rock Station may not keep too many audiophiles awake at night but did offer fun and frolics a-plenty nevertheless. I could have spent hours channel hopping.

CONCLUSION

A feature-packed, upgradable, entertainment centre that is ideal for hi-fi beginners or users on a budget. Easy to use and well designed, the Sansui WLD+ 201L performs both efficiently and with a level of sound quality that will please entry-level hi-fi wannabees, as well as crusty old veterans a-like. Cracking value for money, the Sansui is a budget gem.



VERDICT

Offers a wealth of expected and advanced features, good 'usability' plus a good sonic performance for a low price.

SANSUI WLD+ 201L £350

Sansui
+44 (0)845 64 350 64
www.sansui.co.uk

FOR

- feature list
- ease of use
- value
- low price

AGAINST

- nothing

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response shows a slight roll off at high frequencies, measuring -1dB at 15kHz at -2.5dB at 20kHz, in both Normal and Flat equalisations. This will soften treble a little and remove audible sharpness. 'Flat' equalisation had bass emphasis, as shown in our green trace, whilst Normal measured flat. This result applied to both USB and ethernet ports, but surprisingly whilst USB would play WAV files up to 48k sample rate, ethernet would not read WAV files, requiring them to be compressed to Flac at least.

With 16bit and 24bit signals distortion at 0dB measured 0.2% and at -60dB 1.2%, via USB and ethernet - a mediocre result. Around 0.3% is expected at -60dB from CD, but noise contributed to this result, measuring -88dB.

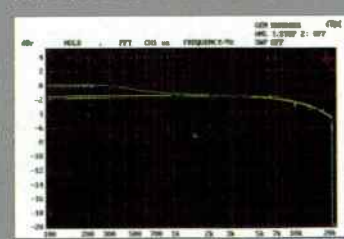
The VHF tuner measured flat to 8kHz, above which a small amount of ripple from the pilot tone filter at 19kHz appears, and output plummets at 15kHz. There was no pilot tone on the output as a result though, the filtering is so good.

Hiss measured -60dB at full quieting, not a wonderful result and about similar to cassette (-70dB is common). Distortion was very low and channel separation wide at 46dB. Sensitivity values were good too, with 0.8mV needed for full quieting and 45µV for a -50dB noise level in stereo (IHF sensitivity).

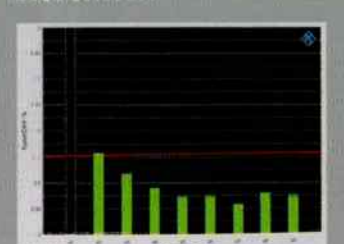
Audio quality via ethernet and USB was fair within the limitations of compressed media files. The VHF tuner was good, if a little hissy. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)	
8Hz-15kHz	
Distortion (%)	
0dB	0.2
-60dB	1.5
Separation (1kHz)	72dB
Noise (IEC A)	-88dB
Output	1.5V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION





Epos's range-topping Elan 35 has some surprises up its sleeve. And all of them are special. Jon Myles explains.

Efficient Elan

Clever, very clever. And that's just the removable front baffle of the new Epos Elan 35 speakers. Add in a vast 92dB sensitivity which makes flea Watt partnering amplifiers usable and it's clear that beneath their prosaic exterior some serious design work has gone into this new floorstander from Epos.

But more of all that later. First let's look at the basics. The 35 is the largest of the company's new range of Elan loudspeakers, designed to replace its previous popular Mi line-up. There's also a smaller floorstanding model and two standmounts.

Clocking in at 915 x 210 x 320mm (H/W/D) the Elan 35 (the

number refers to its cabinet volume) is constructed of 18mm thick MDF and comes in either Cherry or Black Oak real wood veneer.

It boasts two new Epos-developed 187mm polypropylene drivers with bullet-shaped dust caps for mid and bass duties and a 25mm short horn tweeter which the company says has the speed and



accuracy of a good metal dome unit, with the smoothness of a soft dome.

The crossover networks are second order with the two main drivers working together at low frequencies. The lower one reaches up to 800Hz while the second clocks out at 3.2kHz – effectively giving true two-and-a-half way operation.

Round the back there's a set of bi-wire speaker terminals and a large port flared at both ends which undoubtedly aids the Epos's high damping and low distortion.

I used the Elans with both Naim and Creek amplifiers (traditional partners for Epos loudspeakers) and briefly substituted a low-powered Unison Research valve integrated. None had any trouble producing decent sound levels in a medium-sized room.

Oh, and that baffle...which isn't a true baffle at all. Instead it's a sturdy cloth-less grille that snaps onto the front of the speaker to hide all the drive unit fixings. The top portion moulds itself around the tweeter which actually sits proud of the speaker's front face and the attachment has chamfered edges to aid sound dispersion.

It's an ingenious arrangement and Epos also supplies a second cloth-covered grille for those who want to protect their drive units. The company says the sonic signature of the two grilles is the same. That's as may be – but there's no doubt the better sound comes with the cloth-less one in place.

SOUND

Sited some 600mm clear of rear and side walls, the Epos Elans presented a big, bold, sumptuous sound right from the off. That 92dB sensitivity means you could well find yourself backing off the volume a notch or two on

your amplifier compared to other speakers. But it also means they give the impression of having tremendous headroom. Crank up the volume and the Elans simply give a subjective shrug as they confidently handle the increased sound pressure levels. It's as though they want to be played that little bit louder.

Epos speakers of the past garnered something of a reputation for superb musical timing but were occasionally criticised for sounding rather thin and dry. Here, the musical timing is still present but there's now a much richer tonality that adds authority to whatever you play.

Bass is taut and well-defined while the mid-band is deliciously full-bodied and exuberant. Led Zeppelin's Communication Breakdown sees the John Paul Jones/John Bonham rhythm partnership stampin its authority in superb fashion – a solid foundation for the guitar pyrotechnics of Jimmy Page and Robert Plant's vocal gymnastics.

The low-end is undeniably prominent but not in an overbearing way. It does what it's supposed to do - and that is give a solid base for what's going on further up the scale.

That new soft-dome tweeter integrates well too. No, it doesn't have the zing of a metal dome affair – and if that's what you are looking for then perhaps the Elans may not be your thing at first.

But after a good listen you'll realise that they may have been voiced to be a little smoother but that doesn't mean a lack of dynamism. There's also plenty of detail and definition to their sound.

Hard-edged material like The Pixies Bossa Nova album benefits from all this. Where some speakers can turn this into a painful aural assault the Elans separate the different elements – firm bass, dense guitars and Frank Black's trademark vocals – to form a musical whole. It never threatens to trip over into screechiness. Instead there's enough definition to enable individual instruments to be tracked if you want – or else you

can just let the music take you along with it.

Valery Gergiev's recording of The Rite Of Spring with the Kirov Orchestra demonstrated the Epos's full range of talents admirably. Quiet passages were replete with detail and a lifelike rendition of the orchestral interplay while louder passages brimmed with power without ever becoming overly congested.

But perhaps the best example of these speakers' strengths came from two albums separated by a good four decades. Neither The Clash's 'Live At Shea Stadium' nor John Coltrane's 'One Down, One Up: Live at the Half Note' could be considered anything approaching audiophile-quality recordings – but they both crackle with musical energy.

CONCLUSION

And that's what you hear through the Epos Elan 35s. Yes, they let you know the drawbacks in the recordings – but they impart so much fun, detail and enthusiasm to the music that you really don't care.

Any speaker that can do that deserves high praise. If you're looking for a floorstander at anywhere around this price they are well worthy of an audition.

VERDICT

Sumptuous, full-sounding bass allied to a rich midband and smooth treble. Highly recommended.

EPOS ELAN 35 £1200

Epos
+44 (0)1442 260146
www.epos-acoustics.com

FOR

- big, rich sound.
- high sensitivity
- plentiful bass

AGAINST

- not for small rooms

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Elan 35 has a small treble lift on-axis of just a few dB, just enough to ensure the sound balance has some sparkle. However, off axis the Elan 35 measures flat, as our response analysis shows, and this is the balance obtained if they are pointed straight down a room, instead of being angled in toward listeners. Absence of a midband crossover dip will result in plentiful detail and a sense of definition. A small amount of lift in the lower regions will add a bit of body to the lower midband, usually a good thing.

The large port delivers a lot of low-end power and this resulted in an unusually well supported bass response, the Elan 35 measuring flat down to 20Hz no less, an unusual performance. The port is broadly tuned (red trace) and will exert good damping on the bass units so the Elan 35 should play a bass tune well, without waffle. It will also have subsonics, but the flip side is the plentiful bass power will cause small rooms to boom.

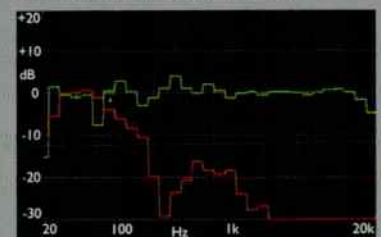
Sensitivity was a whopping 92dB Sound Pressure Level from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) so the 'speaker will be louder than almost any other at a particular volume setting. This sort of sensitivity allows 9 Watt SEs and such like osoterica to be used. With an almost flat impedance characteristic level at 4 Ohms, also the DCR of the bass unit, this is truly a 4 Ohm

loudspeaker. But transistor amps can cope, as can valve amps with a 4 Ohm output tap.

Our 200mS decay spectrum (not shown here) was clean even at low frequencies, so although the cabinet produces a lot of bass it isn't 'hot' or resonant and should not sound 'fat' or boomy.

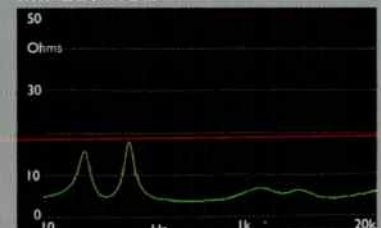
The Elan 35 turns in a very interesting and impressive measured performance and is likely to sound impressive too. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE





Air Play

Digital music streaming systems are maturing fast. Paul Rigby tests the Sonos wireless hi-fi system to see if it can offer both ease of use and top sound quality.

If you want to dip a toe into the world of digital music streamers, there are two names to consider: Logitech and Sonos. Both make players anyone can afford, Logitech's popular Squeezebox Touch costing just £250. But Sonos compete, offering the Play:3 (£259), Play:5 (£349) and Connect: Amp (£399), all reviewed here. With Sonos occupying a large stand at the Bristol Sound & Vision Show 2012 it looks like they're keen to communicate hi-fi pretensions, so we decided to take a close look at what Sonos players have to offer.

The Play:3 and Play:5 are amplifier/speaker all-in-one players that connect via Wi-Fi to a Bridge that sits next to your router; they connect into the home Ethernet network without cables via the

Bridge, but will accept a wired Ethernet connection too, making the Bridge unnecessary. Wireless connection is convenient, wired supports faster data rates.

The Connect: Amp amplifier connects via the Bridge or a wired link and has no loudspeakers. Its Class D amplifiers provide 55W and you attach your own speakers. There are a pair of Line In connectors plus a subwoofer connection point.

Connecting up is easy: load the controller software onto a PC, Mac, tablet or phone, then this software looks for compatible hardware. After plugging each box into the mains, the wireless connection is made by pressing a single or dual button combination. That's it. No messing with IP or MAC addresses and no router preferences to raise the stress levels.

The next step is to show the software the location of your music. Once done, the software organises it into various categories, while play lists can be imported and music can be played directly via the Line In sockets.

There are quirks to the system. For example, when you turn everything off and then on again, the software waits, seeking the hardware all over again. You have to walk around each product pressing buttons to enable the software to reconnect. It might take seconds but, having gone through this once, I expected an auto connect feature to know that it was there a second time and I also expected the system to remember my tweaked preferences for each component, but this was not to be.

Also, the music interface could



"sound now occupied a spacious expanse of the room and had transparent dynamics that challenged top quality, budget, hi-fi sound systems"

do with a polish. Setting up a Music Library, consisting of my personal music, had to be done via the Settings. Here, I was encouraged to select folders containing the music which would then be organised for future play. Yes it worked but the process felt like I was undergoing a technical task. That's what Settings are all about, is it not? I felt like I was stepping outside of the cuddly interface and into the cold, harsh 'preference-like' area. I'd been told that Sonos had Apple-like aspirations but this felt distinctly Microsoft in tone. The software retains room for improvement.

The only other challenges I made to the system was the lack of 24bit/192kHz support. Sonos told me they had not experienced a lot of customer demand for it and it's not on any near term road-map.

Also, despite the support for Apple AirPlay, which can be integrated via an AirPort Express Base Station, Android doesn't have DLNA support. I get the feeling that Sonos find the standard rather disagreeable, "DLNA is designed very

technically, not with the end-user in mind," they said.

In use, in the Settings section of the Sonos software, I entered the Room Settings and turned Loudness to 'Off', to avoid coloured bass veiling the midrange. I then clicked on the Advanced option and Audio Compression and selected Uncompressed. The default is Automatic which allows the Sonos to add file compression on the fly, reducing dynamics.

Before the sound tests I loaded a selection of EAC-ripped WAV files onto my quad-core PC with System 7 and the same files onto my Retina MacBook running OS-X 10.8 (Mountain Lion) and an SSD. Control was issued by both computers along with an iPad 3 and an iPhone 4S.

I also utilised 320kbps MP3s via the Rdio service (www.rdio.com), a music supplier that can be integrated with Facebook, Twitter and Last.fm to allows users to see what their friends are listening to.

Sonos supports a wide range of audio formats, including MP3, WMA,

AAC, AAC+, Ogg Vorbis, Audible, Apple Lossless, FLAC, WAV and AIFF while supporting UK music services including AUPEO!, Deezer, Last.fm, Napster, Pandora, Spotify, Stitcher SmartRadio, TuneIn and Wolfgang's Vault.

Control was simple and easy with the MacBook but a little constricted via my iPhone which



Above, the Sonos Bridge and below it the Connect: Amp that offers 55 W per channel from Class D 'digital' amplifiers that run cool.



a worthy partner



The Play:5 has a bass port that acts as a carry handle!

demanded frequent swapping of screens to access features. The best control option was the iPad which had enough screen acreage plus sufficient mobility to provide an ideal control interface.

SOUND QUALITY

With the Bridge connected to my router, I began auditioning with the small Play:3 which I propped, horizontally, upon a HiFi Racks Podium speaker stand. Playing a selection of overly peak limited chart pop WAVs the Play:3 displayed some thinning within the midrange at high volumes, particularly in the upper mids which restricted the communication of fine detail, while the faux stereo soundstage reached beyond the limits of the physical Play:3 cabinet, providing a room-filling, presentation. Aural balance was better experienced at a distance, near field sounding a little claustrophobic.

Intriguingly, when I tipped the Play:3 on its end, triggering mono EQ, the unit sprang into life. Bass became more compact, punchy and solid, whilst vocals provided more authority and command over the track. Harmonies became structurally sound and consistent while the midrange was more balanced within the mix,

This was highlighted with the new Mo-Fi CD release of Billy Joel's album '52nd Street' and 'My Life'. The mono EQ plus the speaker orientation resulted in a more informative midrange with a broader

dynamic range, a slightly recessed bass that better integrated into the overall mix. During 'walkabout' off-axis wandering – this system is a lifestyle product, after all – the music retained its structure and realism.

Switching to the Play:5, bass enhancement was the most obvious improvement. With the chart WAV music files, low frequency output was both rich and informative with a commanding soundstage plus a grand, almost epic portrayal of the music. There was no option to re-orient the speaker into a vertical position but, to be frank, this was unnecessary as the Play:5 was a confident unit, when sitting in front or listening off-axis.

Switching to the well recorded Billy Joel track, the music possessed a lot of character, involving me better and giving 'hi-fi' a hint of the audiophile. Vocals had a degree of finesse and character and personality while the Joel piano was both vibrant and animated in its presentation.

Moving to jazz vocal and Carol Kidd's 'Do You Believe?', Kidd's voice displayed an attractive textural quality that delivered a gamut of emotions and a surfeit of sonic information while her acoustic guitar backing had a tonal accuracy that the Play:3 could only aspire to.

A big jump in sound quality occurred when I brought the Connect:Amp into the system. Plugging in a pair of Tellurium Blue cables and hooking up a pair of Acoustic Energy Radiance One speakers transformed the sound, as you might expect. The sound now occupied a spacious expanse

The founders of Sonos, John MacFarlane and Trung Mai, started up back in 2002. "We've evolved the system since," said Jon Reilly, product manager for Sonos, speaking to me from the USA. "Sonos wanted to bring back the old school, hi-fi experience. The release of the Play:5, with its integrated amplifiers and speakers, offered a simple purchasing decision and helped to make people understand what we were getting at.

We followed that up with the cheaper Play:3, last year, which made the Sonos system more accessible. The idea was for all of these products to work together seamlessly while allowing you to control the system from an Android or iOS device, tablets or phones."

The core of the Sonos world is wireless. As such, reliability is paramount which, for such a relatively fragile system, is a tough ambition to realise. As Reilly himself states, drop outs kill the experience. Which is why Sonos developed SonosNet. "The Sonos wireless system is a 'mesh network' which becomes stronger the more products you add. That means that the product furthest away from the router talks to the other products to maintain the wireless signal strength. That is, each unit will look at the entire string of products that you have and will then determine which connection pathway is best to maintain the signal strength. Thus, the system can move around walls and enter odd nooks and crannies. We also have monitoring algorithms in every one of our products that check in and make sure that they are playing music perfectly synced."

Sonos take no chances. Their wireless system is based upon the 802.11n Enterprise-level, as used by top corporate organisations, "The better that chipset hardware, the more antennas and streams that are available with multiple inputs and outputs. We buy the top-of-the-line hardware and then add bespoke software to make it even more robust. We even find and correct bugs in these systems that the manufacturers didn't know about or hadn't fixed yet because we are so laser focused on ensuring that you never get a drop-out on your music. We have an in-house team devoted to wireless technology," said Reilly.

Reilly is confident that most people will never have a wireless issue with Sonos, but all products can connect via a wired RJ45 ethernet socket link for higher data rate, better security and less interference as an alternative to wireless linking.

of the room and had transparent dynamics that challenged top quality, budget, hi-fi sound systems. Within the likes of Carol Kidd's 'There Goes My Heart', the Sonos displayed a heart tugging emotion achieved by a significant degree of musicality and insightful detail.

In addition, while using the Connect:Amp, I tested a number of Carol Kidd tracks via two sources: my PC with a mechanical hard disk and a new MacBook with a solid-state drive (SSD). The MacBook proved superior in sound quality. There was less distortion and it was smoother and richer in its sound. Midrange detail emerged better too; the PC masked with noise.

CONCLUSION

This is an accomplished digital music system that gets better with every product release and software update. Requiring no technical expertise to use, the Sonos system offers a wide array of lifestyle and aural choices to suit your home and how you live within it. The Play:5 offers best sound quality from an all-in-one package but the Connect:Amp offers best sound quality overall by relying on external loudspeakers.



The inexpensive Play:3 connects to the mains and ethernet, or via Wi-Fi.

VERDICT ●●●●●

Feature packed and flexible, the Sonos music system is easy to set-up and use, but with some niggles.

PLAY:3	£259
PLAY:5	£349
BRIDGE	£39
CONNECT: AMP	£399

☎ 0808 234 6596
www.sonos.com

FOR

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- ease of use
- versatility
- sound quality

AGAINST

- no 192kHz option
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Classic technique (part 2)

Tony Faulkner is a respected recording engineer and early advocate of the use of high digital sampling rates. He talks to Rafael Todes of the Allegri String Quartet about modern recording techniques.

Part 1, September 2012 issue, is at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk. Go to Music Reviews/Classic Technique.

In a career spanning over 40 years, Tony Faulkner has worked with many 'greats' in the classical world. He has recorded for labels including BMG, EMI, Decca, Sony, DG, Philips, Teldec, Telarc, and Hyperion, working with conductors such as Sir Colin Davis, André Previn, Yuri Temirkanov, Yevgeny Svetlanov, Mstislav Rostropovich, Sir Mark Elder, Sir Charles Mackerras, Klaus Tennstedt to name a few.

RT: Coming back to vinyl. You must have spent a great deal of time in your early career on it?

TF: Yes, to be honest, I've wasted so many days of my life listening to test pressings and rejecting them. People like me have a nervous tic about vinyl!

It was so difficult to get the manufacturing right. These days with audiophile LPs, there is a proper budget for manufacturing. When I started in the music business, you didn't want to pay more than around 15p per unit. I would go off to the cutting room, Pye in Marble Arch with Malcolm Davies, Mike Brown, Gordon Vickary or Tony Bridge and the master would be sent to the factory to make a lacquer, and I'd get a test pressing for approval.

I'd always hear wow and flutter, which particularly in the case of recording piano is a problem, and if the thing is off-centre, you get wow moving the pitch up and down. I can't bear that!

The other fundamental problem is that the frequency response varies from the beginning to the end of the disk. As the diameter of the groove reduces, it's like a 15 ips tape recorder at the beginning, and 7 1/2 ips at the end. Normally you are

Tony Faulkner at Abbey Road studios.



2dB or 3 dB up in the treble at the beginning, and you're 2dB or 3 dB down by the time you've got to the end.

With the sort of music I work with, with long playing times, for instance Beethoven's Eroica Symphony, if you do the first movement repeat, it's too long to go on an LP unless you drop the levels very low, and then you get pre-echoes of the dynamics you get with a composer like Beethoven.

RT: What causes the pre-echo to happen?

TF: It's because of the nature of the grooves. It is an imperfect mechanical process and modulation of the groove walls impact on the previous and following grooves. There is an echo process within how vinyl works; it's part of what people like about the medium.

I'm not trying to sound cynical, there are many subjective effects,

just as how there are in your choice of wine, or where you go for your bacon sandwich! Vinyl isn't transparent. What you put in doesn't come out, as long as it doesn't interfere too much, and you enjoy it – what the heck!

The same is true of analogue tape. Some years ago we did a recording for the foremost British pianist John Lill's birthday, some Schumann in Henry Wood Hall. I stuck up some valve mikes, valve mike pre-amps, DCS convertors, and ran analogue in parallel, an A80 Studer all tweaked up by Tim de Paravicini.

On the playbacks in the control room there were no audiophiles present, just the pianist, John Boyden the producer, a chap from one of the web music magazines and myself. None of us was pre-disposed to prefer any of it, but we all liked the sound off the Studer A80 best. It sounded nicer than the direct sound which is fascinating!

That's the problem. You are trying to create a recording process that's transparent, but if something is euphonic it breaks the rule. The main thing about analogue, is that you get a small amount of compression, which is actually quite helpful to your enjoyment of music. You are not quite so shocked by things, and the amplifier is being given a signal that doesn't have the same extended bandwidth as the real thing but the filtering is smooth. If an amp has any problems with slew-rate for example, then it will handle the analogue tape signal better as it's pre-conditioned to stretch the amplifier less far.

RT: Do you find yourself doing a lot of A/B comparisons when you are trying out new gear?

TF: I don't think that A/B/X comparisons are the way to go. I've done many of them in my time, and they make me very tired. This idea that you can just flick a switch and discern

something is very different from listening to Sibelius 7th Symphony or Carmen. A hi-fi system has to be able to reproduce the music, not flick between one variable and another. Spotting differences is very different from listening to music. It's a bit like multiple-choice versus writing an essay.

RT: I find when listening to equipment, the thing that's always in the back of my mind is "could I live with this?" That's a very different ball game from spotting tiny differences between kit. Things may initially sound better, but they can be fatiguing, or missing out on a dimension which isn't so obvious on an A/B comparison.

TF: Yes! None of the gear we have access to, particularly microphones and speakers, is anywhere near perfect. We have to accept that. For example, I've lived with Quad Electrostatics (ESL63s and 989s) and as preferred monitors for years, but some people absolutely despise them. I like the transparency, and the ease of listening without blowing my brains out.

A lot of professional sound engineers resort to turning the sound levels up. It's exciting and they think they are hearing more detail, but several things happen. Your ears start shutting down naturally as it's not a pleasurable experience for your brain. The other thing is that the frequency response of your ears is different at high levels. If you monitor like this, once you get home and listen at normal levels, you find things disappear! I can remember having a



Abbey Road, Studio 2, where Tony Faulkner has worked with many great artists.

[Courtesy of Abbey Road Studios]

horrible shock doing some sessions at Abbey Road, doing Rachmaninov's 2nd Concerto. We listened quite loud on the B&W Monitors, and when I got it home, there was much less piano on it as far as I and the soloist were concerned. The Quads enable me to listen at 'normal' levels, and still have reasonable detail. They don't have a huge amount of low-end weight, and if you turn them up you will smell ozone and see sparks.

RT: You take great pain over microphones and mic pre-amps?

TF: I use Tim de Paravicini pre-amps which are hand-built. They're not cheap, I've spent a great deal of money on DCS convertors, and posh microphones. If I do stuff with two mikes, I've got a bigger budget than say the BBC who may use 50 mikes at the Barbican. What they've spent on 50, I'd rather spend on two.

I've got some old Neuman M50s, the same as Louis Layton used at RCA, Living Presence. In fact there are four from his original kit I bought at auction in New York. Decca used similar mics at Kingsway Hall and Walthamstow during the '60s and '70s. They've got an excellent pedigree. The bottles need replacing (AC701Ks) every so often: they're a strange micrometer valve with very low noise. I did a blind shoot-out with a series of modern mikes when I was deciding whether to buy them or not, and there was no comparison. You'd have had to have drunk a case of wine not to notice the difference! They were even quieter and lower noise than the modern mikes.



[Courtesy of Georg Neumann GmbH]



[Courtesy of Georg Neumann GmbH]

Neuman M50 microphone with valve output stage, from 1950, used by Tony Faulkner.



Quad ESL-63 electrostatic loudspeakers, used by Tony Faulkner for monitoring.



THE OLYMPICS
Western Movies And Private Eyes
Jasmine

The Olympics might not have been superstars and their musical direction may have been a little unfocused but they were certainly talented and managed to carve a niche for themselves which resulted in a lucrative career during the late fifties, sixties and early seventies.

Consisting of Walter Ward, his cousin Eddie Lewis, Charles Fizer and Walter Ward, this five-piece R&B harmony group began with a single 'I Can Tell', flanked by the B-side, 'That Mambo Beat' – both of which are included here. As is their biggest single, 'Western Movies' which took a sonic flavour of The Coasters while name-checking a variety of popular cowboy-infused TV shows such as 'Wagon Train', 'Maverick' (which you can catch on the satellite TV channel, TCM, incidentally), 'Cheyenne' and 'Wyatt Earp'.

The outfit went on to create a range of novelty hits, sometimes comedy driven, while others linked their songs to a new dance craze: 'Down the Hully Gull' being just one of those. This two-CD set features all of their A- and B-sides, from 1958 to 1961 along with a smattering of bonus tracks from the three albums of the period. The album includes some cracking – and rather more

serious – gems including 'Well' and the Ray Charles' penned 'What'd I Say'.

Other Jasmine releases include 'Louisiana Sounds 1953-1960', a two-CD set featuring the likes of Guitar Slim, Lazy Lester, Bobby Charles and Fats Domino that gives a unique flavour of a single US state: the start of a series? Frankie Avalon's 'The First Five Albums' ranges from 1958-1960 and includes the shared 1960 LP with Fabian, 'The Hitmakers'. Finally, Bobby Vee's 'Take Good Care Of My Baby' features the first four albums by the singer, ranging from 1960-1961, plus bonus tracks, including the B-side, 'Walkin' With My Angel'.

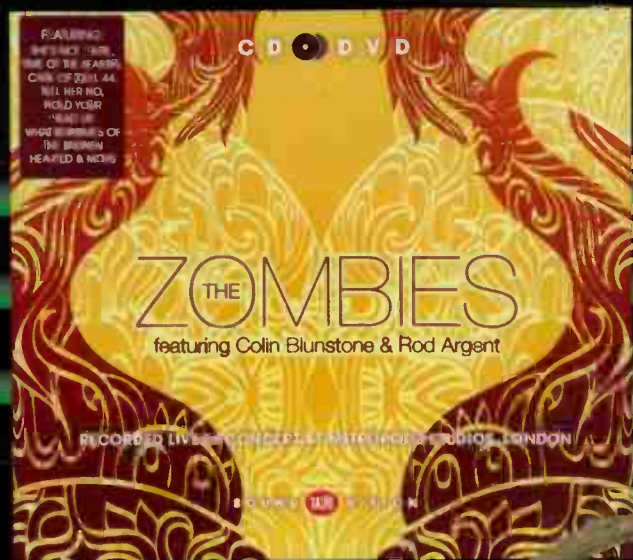
THE ZOMBIES
Featuring Colin Blunstone And Rod Argent Salvo

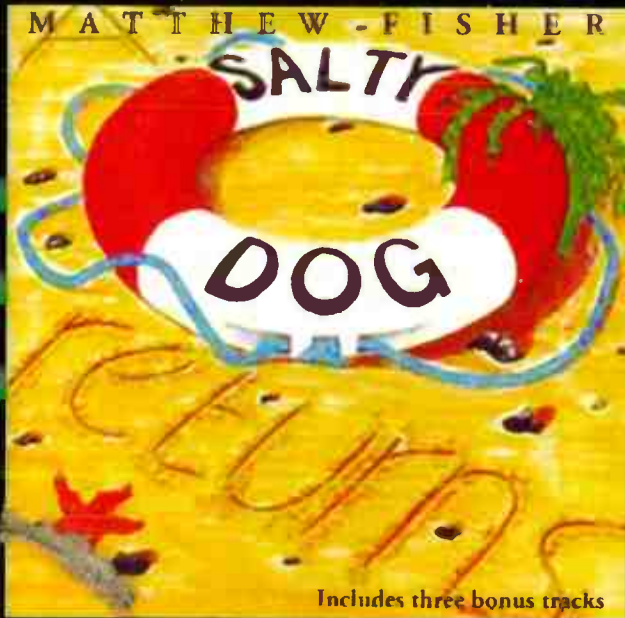
Appearing within the Metropolis Studios in London in 2011 in front of a cosy, 120-strong, audience, the surviving members of the late-sixties pop outfit: Colin Blunstone, Rod Argent, Jim Rodford and Steve Rodford rolled back the years and, amazingly enough, didn't sound like a bunch of old men trying to recapture lost youth. Instead, the band played a storming set.

Fans will be pleased to hear six songs from their seminal album, 'Odyssey & Oracle' – recorded in Abbey Road, alongside The Beatles

as they were sorting 'Sgt Pepper', including 'Time Of The Season', 'This Will Be Our Year', 'Beechwood Park', 'I Want Her, She Wants Me', 'Care Of Cell 44' and 'A Rose For Emily'. This particular live outing also includes Rod Argent's 'Hold Your Head Up' and Colin Blunstone's 'Any Other Way' plus a preview of a contemporary Zombie's studio album via 'I Do Believe'.

This is just one of a range of similarly packaged collections featuring a selection of intriguing artists within an intimate atmosphere. Also in this CD/DVD series, that all include one-on-one interviews, are John Lees' Barclay James Harvest 'Recorded Live In Concert At Metropolis Studios, London', an intimate 2010 outing including 'Mocking Bird'. Bill Nelson and the Gentlemen Rocketeers's recording at the same location in 2011 includes two CDs of rare performances of Bebop Deluxe and solo works (such as 'For Stuart' and 'Golden Dream Of Circus Horses'). Cult favourite and cricket fan, Roy Harper, also appeared in the studio in 2011, completing twelve tracks including the 'Stormcock' classic, 'Me And My Woman'. Finally, look out for two CDs of rarities from Frankie Goes To Hollywood, 'Sexmix' is volume one of 'Archive Tapes and Studio Adventures' including '7" and European mixes plus a sixteen minute mix of 'Relax'.





MATTHEW FISHER
Salty Dog Returns
Angel Air

Fisher was a founding member of the classic sixties outfit, Procol Harum, playing that signature organ sound and co-writing their seminal hit single, 'Whiter Shade Of Pale'. Since then, Fisher has been busy behind the scenes, producing Robin Trowers' first three albums.

This album was initially released in 1994 but has now undergone a reissue. It's intriguing to see that the US sleeve art is used here. This all-instrumental album, which was Fisher's first solo album in around ten years, still includes plenty of examples of Fisher's keyboard talents but, on the instrumental LP, you also get to hear Fisher's skills on other instruments, as Fisher plays everything on the album. There are one or two changes from the original issue. There's no 'Whiter Shade Of Pale', for example or 'Green Onions' which I can only suspect had legal connotations. You do get 'A Tribute To Hank', though, within the main album which reflects his admiration of the Shadows' Hank Marvin plus three bonus tracks: 'In The Bleak Midwinter', 'Theme From the Hauptmann Diaries' and 'Choral Prelude: erbarm'disch mein, oh Herre Gott, BMW 72!'.
 A gentle piece, despite the sometimes dated feel, the album

spans a variety of styles that gives it a scrapbook atmosphere. Procol Harum fans will find it intriguing.

They will also be interested in other Angel Air releases. Dave Ball replaced Robin Trower as lead guitarist in Procol Harum during 1971, a position he occupied for just two years. 'Don't Forget Your Alligator' is his first solo album, featuring heavy r&b and quirky English pop. Also look out for Bedlam, Ball's post-Procol band, featuring drumming legend, Cozy Powell. 'In Command 1973' is a tale of a band torn apart by success. It includes a live version of the Powell hit, 'Dance with The Devil'.

CLARENCE WHITE
Flatpick
Sierra

Limited to 1000 copies, this special Collector's Edition has an additional disc of rarer Clarence White guitar instrumentals from recently discovered tape recordings. The first disc features recordings from 1964, made within weeks of the Appalachian Swing sessions. This first disc closes with a 1967 performance of Jimmy Bryant's 'Laughing Guitar' one of Clarence's last recordings before his death in 1973.

The second disc, from original 1970 tapes, features White on lead guitar and Roger Bush on rhythm guitar, during the time Clarence was a

member of the Byrds. This is followed by three examples of Clarence's guitar instruction tape that he made for his guitar students. The disc closes with instrumental recordings made in 1973. Surprising, informative and sometimes quite startling, this double CD pack is a great find for fans of White, The Byrds and guitar picking fans everywhere.

Also look out for Clarence White's 'White Lightning', a collection of rare, mostly unreleased studio and live recordings, including his first commercial, major label appearance on the now classic album, 'New Dimensions in Banjo and Bluegrass-Weissberg & Brickman'. The Kentucky Colonels: The New Sound Of Bluegrass America, also features White as part of The Country Boys with Leroy Mack, Roger Bush and Billy Ray with guest fiddler Gordon Terry. Out of print since 1965, this is the first CD issue. White fans also need the Bush/Latham & White CD, recorded in 1964, during the Kentucky Colonels national tour. These rehearsal recordings took place at the Chicago home of Leon and Wilma Houston without Roland, the three played in order to fulfil their concert commitment in Chicago but only as The Kentucky Colonels Trio. White steps forward to play lead guitar breaks on twelve of the sixteen songs to cover Roland's absence.

Toshiba SR-370

Direct Drive turntable



Japan's massive Toshiba Corporation has produced some unique high-end components over the years. Haden Boardman uncovers a forgotten turntable...

It is easy to forget just how large and old some Japanese companies can be. Toshiba can trace its roots back to 1875, and through several mergers and name changes. The name Toshiba is an abbreviation from Tokyo Shibaura Electric Company Ltd., and was formed in 1939. Common to a lot of Japanese corporations, audio has played a major part in the company's history and it was a major player in the development of DVD discs and players. In the West, Toshiba may be more famed for flat screen TV and microwave ovens than music making however...

The SR-370 featured here is a very well specified turntable. In common with most Toshiba products, build quality is high, even by Japanese standards, very well finished, and quite luxurious to touch. The plinth is cut for an SME style arm, although Toshiba could supply their own tone-

arm unit. I have no experience of this, having only ever seen the deck fitted with an SME 3009/II Improved.

The deck weighs a reasonable fifteen kilograms, measures 471 x 373 x 180mm and is driven by a Direct Drive motor. The platter is die cast aluminium and weighs just over one and a half kilos. The plinth is a composite material, and in some small ways reminds me of the Technics Obsidian plinth system that supports their SP10/II deck.

The SR-370 is fitted with four fairly chunky isolation feet. Controls include mains power, start/stop, 33/45rpm with individual pitch control, and an obligatory strobe lamp.

Toshiba clearly bought the Direct Drive motor in, as it is very similar to the unit fitted to a Slatedeck that I own. The power supply is a basic Zener diode stabilised circuit, the whole deck drawing no more than

four watts of power from the mains. Reliability wise, there really is very little to go wrong.

I purchased this deck off a well known internet auction site for not a great deal of money. It came marked, and armless, collect only from North London. The John Bicht designed Mission 774 featured a month or two back in this very Vintage Values article seemed an ideal unit for the Toshiba deck, but as it is a solid, un-sprung turntable virtually any arm can be fitted.

The 774 was a breeze to fit. An Ortofon 2M cartridge was mounted in the head-shell, and my own design valve phono stage (the ECC83 tube based 'thirty three and a third') was used connected direct to a rebuilt and modified Heathkit MA12 vintage valve power amplifiers, driving Celestion Ditton 15 loudspeakers, on foot tall stands.

The deck was mounted on an

IKEA 'Lack' coffee table (the budget High End audio support!) the whole lot wired together with cables from The Chord Company.

The deck comes with a reasonable quality lid, but as these only act as acoustic antennas while playing records, it was naturally dispensed with...

One Toshiba 'quirk' common to most of their turntables, is the provision of a pair of phono output sockets and a short connecting cable to the base of the tone-arm. This should not be used, but a cable direct from the tone arm to your gramophone pre amp. Even a high output moving magnet such as the Ortofon 2M I used will lose some output through unnecessary connections.

First album played on the set up was the classic Jimmy Smith 'The Cat'; certainly not for the faint

even playing an old Decca Full Frequency Stereo Sound recording of The World of Winifred Atwell and her famously battered and detuned piano sounded mightily impressive. Clarity of sound, and freedom from noise really was quite a surprise given the deck's lack of pedigree.

In a noisy mood, a little Ninja

unit.

I could not resist running the deck off an old 12 volt car battery. Electrically the deck is very simple and it took less than five minutes to disconnect the internal power supply and wire the unit to the battery (be very careful not to reverse volts here, there is no protection on the

"...real mid band clarity that was way better than I was expecting from this modest looking Japanese disc spinner..."

Tune, the double album Funkjazztical would prove more of a test of how much power you can get from a pair of 12 Watt valve mono blocks rather

fitted Direct Drive motor if you wire up wrongly). My fully charged battery provided about 18 volts and the Toshiba motor required between 16-



Detachable leads from tone arm, best not used!

hearted, this is a real roller-coaster of a recording featuring the classic Hammond tone wheel organ, with some pretty strong orchestration. The turntable/arm combination played it incredibly well. There are quite a few subtle tonal difference as Jimmy's duos Hammond organ bass along with a string player; some lesser (belt drive) decks really struggle to achieve the level of definition the Toshiba managed here. Counter this, compared to absolute references (the Garrard 401) bass was a tad light, but retained punch and definition. I do prefer a leaner more accurate sound than soggy wobbly bass, and accuracy is what the Toshiba delivered here. The Direct Drive motor assured pitch stability;

Individual pitch controls, speed select and start stop.



than the bass resolving power of the Toshiba deck. Again, there was a certain leanness to the sound, but it certainly was not lacking in the lower regions.

Ricky Lee Jones classic first LP, and the all-time favourite track Easy Money sounded quite incredible. My LP copy is getting a little tired after twenty five plus years I have been playing it, but it remained quite silent on this combo, again with a real mid band clarity that was way better than I was expecting from this modest looking Japanese disc spinner. Treble quality matched the entire persona of the deck; clean, clear and quiet.

On some recordings I felt the deck could be a tad bright – not substantially so, but whatever the deck's plinth is made of, clearly gives a slightly stronger input in the treble range, and a mild filtering effect in the bass. I cannot imagine the 'specified' SME Improved arm helping here either, the Mission 774 I used was much better suited.

The deck's feet are not the greatest isolators either. I found an extra isolation platform helped the tonal balance. To get a little more bass you need a little more base! Four small Sorbothane feet fitted under a 25mm thick lump of MDF had a surprisingly positive effect on the sound, proving the point that the Toshiba's feet where not totally isolating the

20 Volts so it was more than happy. In truth, I found there was no sonic advantage. Unlike inferior belt drive turntables, the Direct Drive motor was happy enough with Toshiba's in-built power supply. The only advantage the one of being able to banish the AC mains supply totally from near the deck and potential hum pick up.

One other major tweak is to dispense with the original mat. Most original 1970s mats were horrid, and this one is no exception. I would suggest a thicker than usual 'cork' mat of say four to six millimetres is used. Again, I found this helped a little in the bass. There was some change in bass timbre, but again it brought a slightly 'fatter' quality to the sound, slightly softening the treble.

So for less than £100 (including the cost of collection) I got a remarkable Direct Drive deck. It was cleaner sounding and more musical than the Technics SL1200/1210/II, way cheaper to buy, and ready with a more usable arm cut out. Throw the lid away, mount it on a decent isolation platform, change the mat and fit a good arm (ideally one that matches your cartridge) and frankly you are not one hundred miles away from reference players like the SP10 and Garrard 301/401, with the advantage of this deck coming ready with a decent enough plinth. I cannot say these decks are a common sight, but they are worth hunting out.

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TELLURIUM Q BLACK USB CABLE £298.80

It's a USB cable but it's unique. Normally, when you push music through a USB cable, the data, which arrives in blocks, includes narrow bits which represent the high frequency portions of the final music. Within current USB cables, these bits are largely lost because the cable isn't fast enough to cope, the sampling continues but the narrow bits are largely ignored because they are seen as errors. Not with the Black. There are other improvements too, relating to bass, for example...but Tellurium Q are keeping quiet about those.

My reference Furutech Formula 2 (£70) provided a swinging rhythm with a musical bass but the lower frequencies were a lot more powerful via the Tellurium Q Black (TQB).

Via A David Bowie WAV of the LP, 'Low', there was real mass to the TQB bass with a weight that helped to balance the track. There is a critical point to make here, however. Whenever a piece of audio equipment is praised for producing a greater infusion of bass, that is often followed up by indications that the bass has leaked upwards into the midband, choking dynamics and throttling detail. Not here. Bass was dramatically enhanced but it knew its place, giving wallop to the lower frequencies but freeing the upper frequencies to still provide a lightness of touch that was essential for a full sonic reproduction.

The structure of the rest of the mix was also interesting as it was not just layered but also graded. The midband was far more populated

giving the soundstage a busy feel. The Furutech provided an excellent sense of clarity which the TQB matched but then went two steps further by digging out a whole heap of new detail. The insight of the TQ was quite remarkable.

Moving to the better recorded WAV, 'There Goes My Heart' from Carol Kidd', the Furutech produced a simple, soothing playback but the TQB opened the door fully when previously only an aural crack was visible. The vocal now reflected a wealth of texture with an emotional grain that is essential when a jazz vocalist is trying to interpret a well known song in an effort to place a sense of ownership over it. Here, the attendant acoustic guitar was also more precise with a sense of meticulous string-play that gave the track a new level of precision.

A brilliant performer, the Tellurium Q Black USB cable transforms digital playback, giving you less noise and more music. **PR**

[Contact: +44 (0)1458 251997
www.telluriumq.com]

soundbites

FISUAL HAVANA FX QUAD XL £14/M

A specialist release in the world of speaker cables is this example from Fisual that offers the user four terminations per cable end for bi-wireable connections. The translucent PVC casing covers a loose foil wrap shield, the four conductors being based upon oxygen-free, copper, multi-strand units which Fisual trumpet as a source of the cables' reported low resistance rating, while inductance is also apparently reduced by forming the conductors into a tightly packed twist, wrapping the OFC strands around an inner core.

Undertaking listening tests, initially with the prog track, King Crimson's 'Three Of A Perfect Pair', proved an immediate challenge because this mix suffers from compression. The cables certainly didn't mask this ingredient via any colouration. On the contrary, the Havanas were nothing if not transparent. Treble remained rather tizzy and vocals could be a little harsh during crescendos but the

Fisuals were also very open and dynamic in nature which provided a welcome degree of air and space. This enhanced the structural aspects of the soundstage, giving a lightness to the presentation.

Another facet of these cables was their inherent speed: the Fisuals didn't hang about, bass offered a nippy, elevated, response that balanced well with the informative mids.

Moving to Chet Baker's jazz piece, 'Chet Baker Sings', the Havanas offered a surprisingly mature performance for the price, Baker's voice providing enough emotion and texture to give the ear the 'story' of the song in terms of Baker's interpretation. Piano was both rounded and focused while treble had enough air to coat the soundstage with a shimmering delicacy. Yes, Baker's trumpet was rather forward in the upper mids but it remained light in tone and fast in pace along with the prominent, grounding bass.

Concluding with the early electronic piece, Microglobe's 'Trust'



from the compilation, 'Trance Europe Express 2', this well recorded CD pumped a ghostly swathe of synth soundscapes through the Fisuals. Despite a touch of stridency, the Havanas opened up the mids, allowing them to float above the soundstage, while the meaty bass provided a rhythmic pulse, forging the track, retaining control while the transparent nature of the cables prevented the music from sounding restricted in any way.

The Fisual Havana FX Quad XL cables were surprisingly addictive. Fisual is a company to watch. **PR**

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"they shot a girl in hot pants near an old shack somewhere in the wilderness"



paul rigby

We buy hi-fi because we love to listen to music (well, most of us do) and many of us are quite meticulous about the quality of that music. Yet, the music is only one element of the equation. This is part of the reason that a lot of us prefer vinyl, apart from the sound, of course. It's a wonderfully tactile medium, it often features an immense, evocative, expanse of sleeve art, well designed and formatted sleeve notes plus lots of photographs. This is also why some of us tend to sneer at CD. Because it very rarely provides that added value for money.

There are, though, exceptions. Germany's Bear Family bucks that trend by providing some of the most luxurious and attentive CD-based products on the market today. Not only that, when the label decides to devote time and space to an artist, it provides a thorough and detailed job, providing the fan with everything they could ever desire.

Take the country singer, Buck Owens. The label has just released its third installment in a series of massive and rather beautiful box sets on the artist. Called 'Tall Dark Stranger', it is an eight-CD affair, packing in a magnificent, 108-page hard-backed book spanning twelve inches square plus 214 tracks that features every existing recording from Buck Owens' last years with Capitol Records.

Mychael Gerstenberger, speaking from his home in Germany, collated the immense amount of archival material that forms the book, providing digital fans with that vinyl-like tactile experience. But there were challenges. "There were two other Buck Owens box sets. I also worked on the previous one," said Gerstenberger. "The first two Bear Family collections were devoted

to Buck Owens from his Capitol records' period. He was under contract there and the company regularly sent photographers out to take photo shoots for promotional purposes. In the past, we had access to all of these sessions which meant twenty to thirty out-takes from each session that we could use.

This time, for two thirds of the period spanning this box set, Owens had a new contract, making him his own boss. He was only required to send Capitol the completed albums so, while there were shots of Owens with his Buckaroos backing band, only one picture session, over a 10 year period, was taken with them all together, so I had to think of how to balance the images over the whole book."

That's not to say that Gerstenberger, had no photographs to deal with. In fact, he had access to the whole Buck Owens photo archive, which meant dipping into six to seven DVDs of photographs. Problems still arose when he tried to identify them because, "...they were 'labelled' with something like 'photo 1234S'. I made a rough comparison to put them into different time frames. It needed detective work. For example, I would compare some of the mystery photos with contemporary record sleeves or clothes and hairstyles of the time."

As such, Gerstenberger discovered some nearly forgotten sessions for album sleeves. For example, Owens produced a Bluegrass album that many would have expected to sport an old-time, icon-heavy sleeve. But someone at Capitol said that Owens had to compete with the contemporary Country Rock groups of the day, people like the Eagles.

"So they shot a girl in hot pants near an old shack somewhere in

the wilderness, making around 30 pictures of her," he said. "There was also a session, legendary amongst Country Soul collectors, where R&B singer, Bettye Swann, sang a duet with Owens. No one had ever heard the music itself, never mind knew of the existence of any accompanying photographs. We found the tape of this session and then tracked down the original producer who then supplied original photos of the session, with the pair singing in a vocal booth at Capitol.

Owens, at this time, had his own production company so he could record accompanying musicians who went on tour with him. Amongst these productions was one album that featured one of his backing players. He recorded Owens' greatest hits on one of the first Moog synthesizers. It was called 'Switched On Buck' as opposed to 'Switched On Bach', which was popular at the time. "Among the photographic out-takes, I found a couple of images of a Moog synth with a Stetson hat on the keyboard which was a proposed cover shot. The finished album sleeve featured a painting which was considered more futuristic at the time," said Gerstenberger.

In terms of sound quality, the majority of the master tapes were in great shape, stored, as they were, at Capitol and then by the Owens' estate. The set does contain transfers from acetates, factory metal work and commercial discs. Cedar has been used to reduce excessive noise, but only very discreetly and often only with well worn rarities or demo acetates. Featuring all the Owens LPs of the period, his Bluegrass sessions, all the duets with Susan Raye, Buck's son – Buddy Alan – and that unreleased duet with R&B singer Bettye Swann plus all the Buckaroos' albums, this is a stunning collection. ●

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"luckily nothing was in the way of the cascade of plasterboard and water that came down"



tony bolton

Coincidence can be a strange thing, or perhaps like some, you do not believe in it, and all happenings are pre-ordained. Whatever your view point, it is one of those things that can either put a smile or a frown on your face. In this case, the story ends with some very big smiles, although there were a couple of moments when the opposite could have happened.

It all started a couple of months ago when a friend of mine was forced to move house unexpectedly, and at quite short notice after his landlord put the flat he was living in up for sale. After some searching, a new property was found and I was drafted in to transport his hi-fi and install it in the new flat. The system is quite modest in cost, but carefully chosen and much loved over the ten years that he has owned it. The one thing that it lacks is an equipment rack, but this had not been a problem in the old flat that had shelves conveniently mounted on a wall that housed records, CDs and equipment.

Unfortunately the new flat had only bare walls, and the landlord was understandably not keen on having holes drilled into his newly decorated walls. So some sort of suitable furnishings needed to be found to house the system.

Now as we all know, moving house is a very expensive activity, and my friend's savings and income had been well and truly devastated by financing the usual deposit, rent in advance and agents fees, so going and buying an equipment rack was not a possibility at this particular point in time. However, he loves his music, and the concept of living without it until the system could be set up filled

him with such horror that I wish I had photographed the look on his face when I suggested (very tongue in cheek) that the equipment stay in its boxes and be stored in my attic for safety until a suitable support could be found.

Such comments may have tempted fate somewhat, because that ended up being just what happened. I received a phone call the following day to tell me that there had been a deep rumbling sound during the night, followed by a crash as part of the ceiling came down pretty much exactly where we had discussed setting the system up.

This turned out to be caused by a leaking water tank in the unoccupied flat above. Luckily nothing was in the way of the cascade of plasterboard and water that came down, but needless to say it rendered the sitting room unusable.

Over the next few weeks the flat was put back together while my friend stayed with his family. When we came to move him back in we found a lot of building materials had been left on site, most of which was just rubbish. But amongst it were some lengths of 4 inch square smooth planed pine. We looked at these and the germination of an idea started in both our minds at the same time: why not build an equipment rack rather than buy one.

The idea came to fruition about an hour later when we were walking to the local shops and spotted some big sheets of 1 inch thick clear acrylic lying in a skip outside one of the neighbouring houses.

After suitable enquiries we got permission to help our selves to anything in the skip that might be useful. After a bit of rummaging we returned to his flat with four sheets

of the acrylic, which measured 2 feet 6 inches wide by 2 feet deep, and some blue LEDs with some wiring attached.

After a couple of cups of tea, and suitable consideration, a design was worked out. My friend is six feet three inches tall so most racks are a little low for him to use comfortably. With this in mind we placed the turntable on a pile of boxes and books until we had established the perfect height for it to be mounted for ease of use. Four of the lengths of timber proved to be just long enough to make suitable legs, so were marked up ready for cutting.

We had decided that the stand needed to be able to be dismantled when required since the weight of wood and four thick acrylic shelves would have made it a very heavy and bulky thing to move in one piece. He also wanted to avoid using fixings to hold it together since this would mean drilling the acrylic. So we came up with the idea of mounting the shelves in slots cut in the legs, and relying on accurate carpentry to create tightly fitting joints that would make it solid, but still allow it to be dismantled.

After a few hours of careful work with saw, hammer and chisel we had fashioned a stand that was solid enough to support both our weights. The shelves were a tight enough fit in their slots that, after tapping them into place with a mallet, the stand was quite rigid. The LEDs were mounted in little recesses behind the slots so that they shone sideways through the acrylic.

So for absolutely no expense my friend's system is now securely mounted on a very eye catching piece of furniture. Coincidence or fate. I leave you to decide. ●

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August 2012 Paul Rigby, HiFi World Magazine



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Worldradiohistory

"Apple state their preference for 24/96, in linear PCM digital format"



noel keyword

I was bemused by the description of hi-fi as we know it being "old school". It's mildly deprecating but likely represents a common enough view, at least by those of a certain generation who see today as "cool" and yesterday uncool by definition. There's nothing less fashionable than something that has just gone out of fashion.

It's a simple and gullible view, driven by advertising and marketing to promote consumption. In truth a lot of what passes as "cool" today will be skipped after a few short years, never to be remembered or revived again, much like stack systems, music centres and their predecessor, the radiogram. Well, OK some radiograms had a certain Tygan wrapped charm, but stack systems lost this to an austere aesthetic that spoke of cheap, sweat shop production.

Today's cool digital systems are overwhelmingly complicated. I'm often puzzled by the products that come through our door, but I'm not in awe of them – far from it. Just being able to cope with all the many digital file types out there brings problems, but there's nothing intrinsically clever about their existence. Such complexity is a problem of the industry's own making, due to the pursuit of proprietary technologies and lack of standardisation that results. We can download music in MP3, AAC and WMA, in a wide range of data rates. Then there is WAV, which is encapsulated PCM, the original base file format; its problem is that it takes up space. To counter that drawback we have 'lossless' compression, or FLAC which includes metadata, and I must also mention ALAC and AIFF (yes, I know I have missed out some). Is this "cool"; is the profusion of file types clever?

The variety of formats has

unwanted consequences. Users are confused by them – what is the merit of each? And which one to use?

Other drawbacks reared their head whilst I was testing the Sony STR-DN1030 receiver and Sansui WLD+ 201L network player for this issue. Budget products like these cannot play every file out there and when they refuse to play one it gets confusing. The reason a file will not play is rarely made obvious by the offending piece of equipment. I was temporarily baffled by the Sansui WLD+ 201L refusing to play WAV over ethernet after it had successfully played WAV test files from a USB memory stick. It's not a limitation I have encountered before. Similarly, the Sony receiver would only play a selection of compressed files, something I have encountered before – but it always takes me by surprise. As a result of the difficulties imposed by selective file playing, my armoury of test files grows daily to cope with such scenarios, and the channels through which they are delivered also increases – memory stick, ethernet and S/PDIF, Bluetooth and wi-fi.

But as file formats proliferate and delivery channels grow, so too cost grows if a product is to cope with it all. Both the Sony and Sansui products are budget items built to a price and file incompatibility is a result. But there is a place for 'budget' so I still admire them, for what they make available at a reasonable price.

The profusion of formats and delivery systems racks up cost for no benefit. It may be "new school" technology but it hinders ease of use and well as making life difficult, even impossible for the man in the street. Budget products have to discriminate, because they cannot do it all, and I'm sometimes baffled by the choices made.

Apple has its feet on the ground in this issue. They realise there will always be a desire for quality and this spurs development. So although iTunes relies on AAC compressed music files running at a measly 128kbps, recently iTunes+ was launched where files run at 256kbps, usefully improving quality. In a document published earlier this year, entitled Mastering for iTunes, Apple state that "an ideal master will have 24-bit 96kHz resolution. These files contain more detail from which our encoders can create more accurate encodes. However, any resolution above 16-bit 44.1kHz, including sample rates of 48kHz, 88.2kHz, 96kHz, and 192kHz, will benefit from our encoding process". Apple show a strong interest in preserving audio quality and appreciate that there will always be a drive toward high fidelity. In this document Apple state their preference for 24/96, in linear PCM digital format.

That Apple should put a stake in the sand supporting 24/96 PCM is interesting. OK, 24/96 is a done deal, being widely used by recording studios today. But Apple's clear statement allows us all to breathe easy, confident that today's "old school" high fidelity technologies represent tomorrow. The digital eco system to support 24/94 already has services like HD Tracks, the digital distribution service of tomorrow. This is where old school hi-fi has gone: traditional hi-fi systems fronted by a media player.

Meanwhile new school is grappling with outdated file compression technologies and dodgy radio transmission systems.

As I said earlier – there's nothing less fashionable than something that has just gone out of fashion – and that's where much of today's new school technology is going. ●


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Lean On Me

Promoted as the Rolls Royce of supports, Paul Rigby reviews the luxurious Track Precision 600 speaker stands.

To many users, hi-fi stands are a necessary annoyance. They're the things that add an irritating £100 onto your new bookshelf speaker bill. They're the items that lift the speakers up to ear level and stop them collecting dust on the floor. They're the fashion accessories that make the offensive speaker look slightly more palatable to your partner.

In actuality, they are so much more than that because the speaker and its attendant stand forms a synchronous, single sonic entity when music is playing. Speaker stands can make or break a speaker's overall sonic performance. Poor stands can introduce fifty-seven varieties of distortion into the speaker sound loop. Poor stands can also reduce your bass to a floppy, woolly mess, they can dull your midrange to resemble a wet Wednesday in Rotherham and make your soundstage sound as focused as a drunk after twenty pints of Theakston's Old Peculiar.

Like cables and isolation shelving, speaker stands are grossly undervalued. Which is why many will balk at the price of these stands from Track Audio, seeing them as rich men's toys: accessories for the guy who has everything, in fact. Not so, you should see them in the same way that you look upon a component upgrade. They are just as important.

Quite apart from the fact that they look gorgeous, quite a change from the agricultural designs I'm normally used to, the Tracks feature a variety of specialist technologies aimed at presenting your speakers in their best light.

Isolation mounts on the stands have been designed to minimise room resonance. Within the mounts, Track has integrated hydraulic dampers to tackle vibration, turning it into harmless heat which then dissipates. This decoupling should

improve bass performance and naturalise midrange performance. You will even find a spirit level built into each stand for levelling purposes.

Build quality is second to none with high grade stainless steel and a finely adjusted ball lock system altering leg height. Arriving with a ten year guarantee and available in satin black or silver anodised finishes, you can request other colours, if you wish.

Presented as a tripod design for solid support, the stands can be bought in different sizes and heights to support different types of speakers such as subwoofers and more, with different top-plate sizes.

SOUND QUALITY

To best review the Track stands and seek out even the most subtle of tonal variations, I decided to concentrate on high resolution analogue as the exclusive sound test source. Spinning the 'Chet Baker Sings' vinyl, the first impression was of a mix that was acting more as a single entity than a collection of highlights. The stereo image was better integrated while the soundstage layout was enhanced and more democratic. Baker, himself, was set deeper into the soundstage, adding to the 3D effect, while his delivery had a tonally more correct approach. Bass was now more prominent and active within the track, driving the rhythm but also helping to improve a better balance to the presentation.

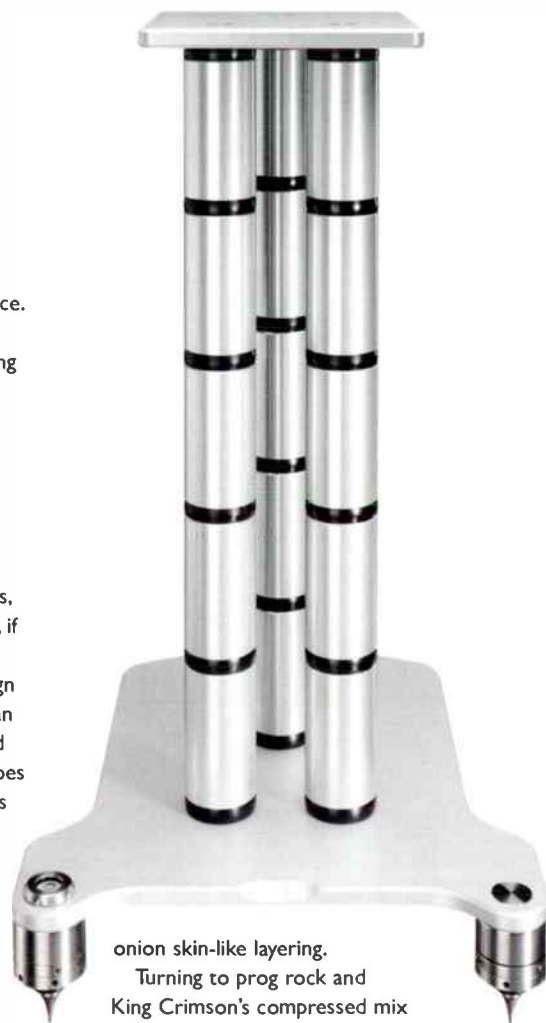
The lowering of the overall distortion, effected by the isolation technologies inherent within the design, also meant that the midrange lost an element of blurring and bloom which formerly made the trumpet sound diffuse while the now multifaceted treble appeared with

onion skin-like layering.

Turning to prog rock and King Crimson's compressed mix of 'Three Of A Perfect Pair', the stands introduced new instrumental separation which then released a raft of new detail to the ear. The reduced distortion lowered the aggressive compression effects. The treble, also a compression victim, now enjoyed greater isolation which aided sound quality, producing more detail. Finally, bass now sounded tighter, faster and more effective while bass guitar exhibited a highly defined presentation.

CONCLUSION

The essence of the sonic improvements from the Track Audio Precision 600s hung on how the stands reduced distortion. By lowering the noise floor, the stands provided greater opportunity for a richer variety of frequencies to come forth. That made these works of supportive art audiophile essentials and, despite their relatively high price, an absolute bargain in terms of their improvement to sound quality.



VERDICT ●●●●●

Beautifully designed but with audiophile-level sonics a priority, these stands will allow many music fans to truly hear their speakers for the first time.

TRACK AUDIO

PRECISION 600 £1,380

+44 (0)1494 723755

www.trackaudio.co.uk

FOR

- attention to detail
- low distortion
- clean soundstage
- balanced price

AGAINST?

- nothing

vinyl section

contents

OCTOBER 2012

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INSPIRE QUEST CLEAR TURNTABLE 84

Tony Bolton checks out an interesting Rega upgrade path.

SOUNDBITES OYAIDE STB-MS TURNTABLE WEIGHT/ILFORD ANTISTATIC CLOTH 89

Paul Rigby reviews some useful turntable accessories.

CREEK WYNDSOR PHONOSTAGE 90

Creek's top phono stage catches Tony Bolton's ear.

CLEAR AUDIO DA VINCI CARTRIDGE 93

A bank breaking moving coil cartridge, auditioned by Tony Bolton.

SRM ATHENA TURNTABLE AND EL-1 TONEARM 96

Tony Bolton reviews a new SRM turntable with tweaked Rega arm.

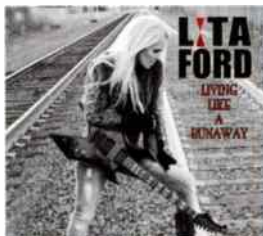
news

ROCK SHOCK

Varied rock styles for you this month including Sodom's new official bootleg, 'The Witchhunter Decade' (SPV), a double album that takes in a range of live performances plus rehearsals ranging from 1984 to 2003 with the majority of the tracks residing within the eighties.

Ex-member of the seventies hard rock girl group, The Runaways, Lita Ford's latest release, 'Living Like A Runaway' (SPV) arrives as a coloured vinyl, limited edition double album complete with an included CD version of the album. Full of punk-infused heavy metal but with pop hooks to keep the fans happy plus strong, post-divorce, material. Ah, those break-ups make for good songs.

Also look out for Anthrax's 'Among the Living' (Wax Cathedral), the band's best album, from 1987. Full of speedy riffs, an aggressive presentation plus socially conscious lyrics, this is thrash metal as its best.



SPEAKERS CORNER

A trio of goodies from the German label (www.speakerscorner.de) includes Blood, Sweat & Tears' '3' which, although couldn't match the quality of the first two albums, was a credible companion.

Ella Fitzgerald's 'Sings The Johnny Mercer Song Book' is one of her best in the long-running series, although Fitzgerald is selective to maintain her deportment and flow, ignoring the punchy numbers.

Finally, Al Green's 'Call Me' is the best he ever produced. Released in 1973, this unforced LP is remarkable in the multitudinous genres it covers, yet Green makes it all fit,



DOUBLE YOUR MONEY

Four new dual format packages have arrived via Doxy that provide extra value for money.

Two new Little Richard LPs: 'The Fabulous...' and 'Little Richard Volume 2' supply both a 180gm vinyl and a CD for double the fun. The former was a post-career album, released in 1959, full of outtakes and studio tracks tinged with a gospel feel while the latter was released in 1958 and features 'Good Golly, Miss Molly'.

Also look out for a Nina Simone double. 'Sings Ellington' (1961) provides a unique Simone take on familiar music adding while her usage of Duke Ellington rarities (i.e. 'Merry Mending') is worthy. 'At the Village Gate' (1962) is a live piece that shows Simone at the start of her prime and a supreme interpreter.

MORE MUSIC

Music On Vinyl (www.musiconvinyl.com) steams ahead with a wide range of interesting releases beginning with a rarity via Cypress Hill's 'III: Temples Of Boom'. Not one of their best but it does arrive in black and silver vinyl.

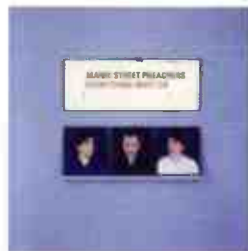
Onto The Red Devils and 'King King' (1992) the twentieth anniversary reissue, mixing blues with alternative indie. From blues and rock to jazz and rock with Weather Report's 'Sweetnighter' (1973). A real rhythmic exploration for Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter et al as newly introduced synthesizers mix with a wraithlike sax.

Over to 16 Horsepower's debut, 'Sackcloth 'N' Ashes' (1996), which mixes country rock with punk and backwoods stories filled with Edgar Allen Poe.

Back to 1967 and Sagittarius' 'Present Tense', a sort of studio project from Beach Boys/Byrds producer, Gary Usher, who, along with Glenn Campbell and Beach Boy, Bruce Johnston produce gentle folk-rock. Entrancing.

Next is Big Brother And The Holding Company's 'Live At The Carousel Ballroom 1968', a double album from the archive of Bear, the Grateful Dead soundman, which is a brilliant production from a tight band that had just finished the 'Cheap Thrills' sessions.

Also look out for the avant-rock of Gusgus' 'Polydistortion' mixing power and restraint; Manic Street Preachers' 'Everything Must Go', the 1996 album released after the disappearance of band member, Richie James and Portishead's 'Roseland NYC Live' which adds a full orchestra to add tension to the standard arrangements.



TAKE A LEFT...

First up on the more avant side of the music is Fenn O'Berg's 'In Hell' (Editions Mego; editionsmego.com), a collection of jams from their 2010 tour in Japan. The music mixes ambience and free jazz with electronic, keeping it honest.

We step back in time to visit the advanced guitar and synth movements of Franco Falsini within prog and space rock. 'Cold Nose' (Editions Mego) was his 1975 debut that also adds advanced ambience and psychedelic rock elements.

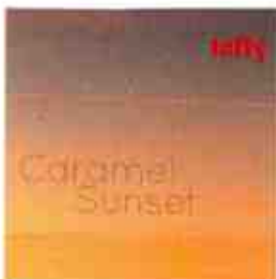
...AND FINALLY

A debut from Taffy is 'Caramel Sunset' (*Club AC30*; www.clubac30.com), a four piece from Tokyo but they sound like a middle-class wannabees from Cambridge. Girl-fronted, 90s drenched, indie.

Hilary Hahn and Hauschka's 'Silfra' (Universal) takes classical improv via an exploratory violin plus a treated piano and paints intriguing sonic pictures that tweak the nipples of your musical attention.

The Bermondsey Joyriders' 'Noise & Revolution' (who add MC5 man, John Sinclair) take a blues riff and then punkify it with a growl and a scowl. Pub rock like wot it was...but with a social conscience. More power to their ageing elbows (www.bermondseyjoyriders.co.uk).

The Jazz Couriers...wait for it, 'Live In Morecambe!' Coo, my mum used to go on holiday there as a child, with a marquee too. Eating winkles. This LP features hard bop from Tubby Hayes, Ronnie Scott and the gang in 1959 via original master tapes via Gearbox (gearboxrecords.com).



Clear path

Inspire offer an upgrade path for old Rega turntables in the attractive Quest Clear, an acrylic beauty. Tony Bolton looks at the options.

Over the last few years Inspire Hi-Fi, based just off the M1 near Chesterfield in Derbyshire, have developed a range of modifications and improvements for both the Linn Sondek and also the Rega series of turntables, and it is the latter that we shall be looking at here. They have come up with an interesting choice of options. Most manufacturers of after-market upgrades just offer the upgrades and nothing else. Inspire have taken things a stage further and offer the full upgrade package as a complete turntable, that can even be supplied with a cartridge so all you have to do is plug in and play.

The concept behind this is simple. There are a lot of old Rega decks around dating from as far back as the 1970s. Some are still in fine fettle, but others, for whatever reason, are showing their age. There are also various areas in which our knowledge of all aspects of the vinyl replay chain have improved over the last 30 odd years. With this in mind, Inspire offer a range of options that can be purchased one at a time, as funds allow, or in one go.

The Quest Clear under review here is an amalgamation of these

upgrades and it is also available as a complete package, should you not have an old Rega to modify.

The first step is to replace the old plinth with one made from 20mm thick diamond polished clear acrylic, costing £199. The old glass platter and felt mat are disposed of and replaced by a 20mm thick frosted acrylic example (£120) and the whole thing is supported on machined acrylic cone feet. Provided that they are in good condition the original motor, inner platter, bearing and arm are retained and fitted to the new plinth. I must admit that I found the location of the power switch at the centre rear of the deck a little unusual.

All parts are stripped and cleaned prior to refitting. A complete

"precision, clarity and a sensation of very tightly controlled timing"

range of all Rega parts are stocked, so if anything is either damaged or too worn, then a new replacement can be sourced instantly. This also enables complete decks like this one to be built from scratch if required.

Further upgrades include a 20mm thick platform (£150) that sits underneath the plinth and has locating holes for the cone feet drilled into it, and the Puka Record Weight which is made from polished stainless steel and available for £55. Since starting this review Inspire have contacted me to advise that they have upgraded the complete Quest Clear package to include the Puka at no extra cost. It was not part of the package when the review sample was sent, so has not been included in our measurements or comments.

The only extra to go with the Quest Clear that we had was the

Audio Technica AT 440MLa moving magnet cartridge at £195. Other options include the Ortofon 2M series.

I started my listening by playing Alfred Brendel's recording of the Beethoven Piano Sonatas. I compared the sound both with and without the extra plinth underneath and found that using it imparted a greater sense of calmness and control to the proceedings. The sound was good without it, but the improvement was such that all subsequent listening was done with it in place, and I would recommend budgeting for this if you

are following the rebuild path.

The piano was firmly placed in the centre of my listening space. I was impressed with the focus of the sound, and also with the bass depth and weight; always a good characteristic of Rega arms such as the RB202 fitted here.

The performance itself came across as very measured and precise. Brendel has a reputation for being a 'thoughtful' pianist, and I feel that the Quest Clear captured this element in his playing. However, when playing some other classical music with Arturo Toscanini at the helm I felt that the same elements in the sound came to the fore, which is not what I expected, since Toscanini was always an impassioned conductor. If you find you prefer more 'considered' conductors such as Otto Klemperer then you will appreciate the way that





this deck relays classical music.

Later on I had moved onto the complex time signatures of Dave Brubeck's 'Time Out', where I found the weight and speed of the bass certainly drove the music along in an energetic manner, while still retaining a seemingly unshakeable composure.

This is an American Columbia second pressing in stereo that has survived in excellent condition. The Inspire deck displayed the background detailing in the sound that makes these early pressings so collectable today. I felt that I was very close to hearing the master tape being played, which is quite an impressive feat for such a reasonably priced turntable and cartridge combination.

However, I felt that there was still a certain coolness to the sound that sat slightly at odds with my expectations. I am used to hearing this record either on my Sondek or else on the Clearaudio Master Solution, both of which are admittedly far more expensive decks, but both of which seem to let rather more emotion through. How much of this was due to the Rega RB202 arm I wouldn't like to say,

but, knowing the rather unemotional nature of these arms, I wouldn't be surprised to find that the fitting of one of Inspire's own arms, which are breathed on by Audio Origami, would release layers of feeling into the music.

I next went for some good '60's pop in the form of the Walker Brothers first LP. Scott Engel's rich baritone soared out of the speakers, backed by a tightly timed group of musicians performing around him. This is a mono record, in reasonable condition, and I was pleasantly surprised at the near lack of surface noise interference when played on this deck. It sounded tonally rich and very detailed, but still with that coolness that, by now, I was getting used to.

The sonic image was quite neatly drawn, occupying about two thirds



of the space between the speakers and with moderate depth to it. I was aware of the levels of background detail that this deck seems to do very well, helping to ease me into the music, but I still did not feel emotionally connected to the sound. I enjoyed it, don't get me wrong, but there was a certain professional impassiveness that left me untouched as the sounds flowed past me.

The last record that I played was Morcheeba's first release from 1996, 'Who Can You Trust'. For me, one of the delights of this group's music is Skye Edwards' voice which sounds as though you are being caressed by sonic velvet. I missed the personal touch, feeling as though I was receiving a professional courtesy rather than the more intimate response of someone that I know well. Otherwise the reproduction was difficult to fault, especially at this price point.

Overall I felt that the Inspire Quest Clear turntable was very good. It can give decks costing quite a lot more lessons in how to do tight and detailed bass. It images very well across a space neatly defined by the speaker edges, and seems to be able to extract quite a lot of subliminal information from a record and relay it in a very convincing manner.

It is leaps and bounds ahead of any stock Rega that I have heard in all but one thing, and that is the rather stiff-upper-lipped attitude to passion and emotion that it displayed. If you run a Rega, like the sound, and have a bit of cash spare then I would seriously consider starting along the upgrade path that these various components offer.

If you like a cooler headed approach to music, as a lot of people do, then ignore my griping and go ahead and buy a Quest Clear. You will love it! It offers precision, clarity and a sensation of very tightly controlled timing. If you like all of these aspects, but want a bit more emotional intensity, then I would consider other arm options, because I do feel that



the RB202 has a very British attitude to displays of such things.

I had a tough time deciding on how many Globes to give this. Rega fans will call it a 5 Globe performer, especially at the price. I have followed my heart here, and given it 4 on the grounds that I like my emotions stirred and shaken a little more than this deck and arm combination offered.

The Inspire Hi-fi workshop and showroom is literally a minute from Junction 29A of the M1. Go and book a demonstration and have a listen for yourself. It will certainly be worth the drive.

MUSIC USED;
 Alfred Brendel. Beethoven. 'Piano Sonatas Vol. 3'. Turnabout Records. TV 34113DS. 1970.
 Dave Brubeck Quartet. 'Time Out' Columbia Records (USA). CS 8192. 1959.
 The Walker Brothers. 'Take It Easy with...'. Philips Records. BL7691. 1965.
 Morcheeba. 'Who Can You Trust?' Indochina Records. ZEN009LP. 1996.

SYSTEM USED:
 Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage/ Tucana II amplifier. Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Over a period of minutes our Clear modded Rega varied speed from 0.1% fast up to 0.4% fast and back. This sort of long term speed wander isn't unusual in Rega belt drives lacking speed control and it produces rather random wow that in this case measured around 0.2%. That isn't a massive figure by any means, old Regas typically producing 0.3%, largely due to the Clear's extra platter mass and flywheel effect, but mass does not affect the basic speed wander issue caused by the motor. Total DIN weighted W&F measured 0.12%, quite low and about as expected for a Rega based turntable.

Rega turntables are distinguished by the one piece cast Rega arm, in whatever variant it takes, and the budget RB202 on this deck gave excellent results under test, the main arm tube bending mode being very well suppressed, our vibrational analysis shows.

Wow	0.2%
Flutter	0.05%
W&F unwt'd	0.2%

W&F DIN wtd	0.12%
Speed accuracy	+0.25%

SPEED STABILITY

Speed variations

ARM VIBRATION

Arm vibration behaviour

VERDICT ●●●●●
 Affordable complete turntable, or upgrade package for Rega decks, available in stages.

QUEST CLEAR £699.00
 Inspire Hi-fi
 ☎ +44 (0) 1246 472222
www.inspirehifi.co.uk

FOR

- well thought out upgrade path
- clean and clear sound
- low surface noise

AGAINST

- position of power switch
- may sound a little cool for some

RETRO

REPRODUCTION

QUALITY HIGH FIDELITY & VINTAGE

AMPLIFIERS			
Audionote kit1 300w amp massively modified	£995	Sara Fuji SF1-35 open baffle 3 way design	£495
Audiolab 8000Q british built mint boxed	£395	Velodyne SPL 800MKII subwoofer	£395
Anatek monoblocs £2400 new	£995	Velodyne SPL 1200 remote control sub	£595
Audionet integrated amp superb engineering and german construction	£1956	TURNTABLES/TONEARMS	
Bel Canto remote valve pre amp	£695	Audiolab 8900 PPA phono stage	£595
BKS T140 American power amp great for driving electrostatics	£345	Audio Ongami PU7	£995
Croft integrated valve amp 4x EL34 with valve phono stage	£495	Clearaudio Victory cartridge £1000 new	£345
Cyrus XPA power amp	£295	Clearaudio Master Reference with parallel tracking tonearm	EPOA
Cyrus PSX great condition	£175	Creek OBH 9 moving coil pre amp	£95
Dynaco stereo 80 valve power amp	£795	EAR 834P mm/mc with volume	£795
EAR 834L	£695	Garrard 301 with custom aluminium & polished granite plinth	£1195
EAR V20 valve amplifier	£2495	Garrard 401 in birch ply custom plinth with lid	EPOA
Golden Tube Audio superb American made tube pre amp	£475	Garrard 401	£595
Hamman Kardon PM665 top of the range integrated amp	£350	Graham Slee Fanfare Gram amp 3 moving coil phono stage boxed as new 10mths old	£195
Hoveland HP100 with MM phono stage valve pre amp	£2995	Graham Slee PSU1 power supply upgrade as new	£130
Hoveland Sapphire valve power amp	£3495	Graham Slee Era Gold V with PSU1	£325
JBL Synthesis S655 5 channel power amp	£495	Golding PA1 phono stage	£75
Krell KSA250 Class A power amp	£2295	Infinity Black Widow tonearm SME mount great with high compliance cartridges	£195
Krell 400Xi remote balanced integrated amp	£1795	Linn LP12 various	from £445
Mendian 100 series three box power amp	£445	Linn Basik turntable no arm or lid	£65
Mendian 518 digital audio processor		Linn Axis with Akito tonearm never been used boxed as new	£495
Mission 76777 pre and power amplifier 100w cast case work a real classic	£795	Luxman PT300 turntable	£375
Musical Fidelity E200 balanced remote pre amp	£295	Micell Focus 1	£295
Musical Fidelity E300 balanced power amp	£350	Micell IsoHera phono stage	£375
Musical Fidelity valve X-pre amp	£225	Musical Fidelity XLP5 phono stage cylindrical type	£125
Musical Fidelity Class A integrated amp	£275	Pure Sound T10 moving coil transformer high and low settings 1 month old boxed	£275
Musical Fidelity Tri Vista integrated amp boxed	£1795	Project RMP9 top of the range turntable with carbon tonearm	£895
Naim NAC 82 pre with Teddy Pardo PSU	£1495	Rothwell Rossan phono stage mm	£295
Naim 50 power amp boxed	£225	SME 10 with tonearm with V	£3295
Naim 250 olive type power amp	£795	SME 3009 tonearm series II	£225
Naim F1atcap 2 boxed	£445	SME series 3 tonearms various	from £175
Naim 42.5	£225	Syrinx LE1 tonearm recently wired with cardas cable fitted and checked by Audio Ongami	£175
Naim 140 olive case work	£345	System Deck II biscuit tin model (SME mount)	£225
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Naim CD S with power supply	£1395	CD PLAYERS, DACs	
Naim NACDS power supply new style front panel	£695	Arcam CD73 24bit cd player black finish	£225
Naim Teddy Pardo PSU	£575	Arcam CD92 DCS ringdac HQCD boxed mint	£395
Naim 52 pre amp	£795	Marantz CD52 MKII special edition	£145
Pase Linear 700 power amp	£495	Marantz CD50 multibit dac	£95
Primare A20 integrated amp	£395	Meridian 506 20 bit CD player	£495
Quad 405 MkII	£225	Meridian G08 CD player	£1195
Quad 34 pre amp phono socket	£225	Meridian 208 and CD player with built in pre	£345
Red Rose 5 integrated valve amp Mark Levinson design new £7000	£2995	Musical Fidelity A3CD 24bit CD player boxed	£295
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Sony F540E heavyweight integrated	£245	Naim CDS3 with Teddy Pardo PSU	£2795
		Pink Triangle litaval HQCD superb player	£3000
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ATC Anniversary Active 50's new £17950	£7995	Sony CDP X-8920E	£125
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Cab net for 12" Tannoy with amplification built in model M508	£195	Audiolab 8000T tuner boxed	£495
Castle Howard 2 oak finish	£495	Creek T40 FM Tuner	£295
Castle Chester dark oak finish	£345	Cyrus AM/FM tuner (original version)	£295
Duvel Planet omni directional speakers	£495	Mendian 204 Tuner	£245
Gradient SW63 bass modules for with active crossover for ESL boxed	£695	Naim NAT02 recently serviced	£650
Goodmans Aeon 201 12" full range 150hm speaker 1 pair	£295	Nakamichi BX150E	£145
Goodmans Magnum K's	£125	Quad F1M4	£175
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KEF RDM Two monitor speakers	£395	Sony ST5100 FM/AM classic 70's tuner	£125
Linn MKII Kans	£195	Sony 700ES tuner	£75
Linn Sara active speakers	£145	Sony ST8900 QS DAB Tuner	£145
Lockwood Minor cabinet for Tannoy 10"	£195	MISCELLANEOUS	
Martin Logan Aeron Electrostatic speakers	£945	Denon DRW585 a top of the range cassette deck	£125
Martin Logan Aeon E Electrostatic speakers	£1195	Aika GX77 open reel with various tapes mint condition	£495
Magnaplanar 1.4	£795	Pioneer MXA3 valve multiplex FM decoder ultra rare superb sound	£295
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Mission 753	£495	Chord Anthem 3mtr: balanced interconnect	£295
Mono Pulse 32A 8 months old ex dem.	£645	Cardas golden ref. 8.5mtr: balanced interconnect	£995
Mono Pulse 32S ex dem	£495	JPS super conductor 2	£645
Monitor Audio Silver B1 cherry finish	£495	Marantz super scope 3 head portable cassette deck just serviced	£295
Monitor Audio GS10 piano black finish	£495	Nakamichi receiver 2	£195
Musical Stones Italian Solid Marble floorstanding speaker with Dynaudio drive units	£495	Townshend ISOL DCT loudspeaker cable 5mtr pair	£495
Quad ESL63 need work	£245	Nakamichi LX3 cassette deck	£245
Quad ESL988 Newuo	£1295		
Red Rose R3 Ribbon bookshelf speaker new £3000	£995		
Sentorian early 60s corner speaker pair	£295		

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OYAIDE STB-MS £229.79

It's not a turntable clamp or even a weight – although that's what it certainly looks like. No, it's described as a Vinyl Stabiliser because that's what it does.

Made from aluminium, silver carbon and brass, the Oyaide STB-MS (MS, for now) attempts to reduce vibration and enhance the tracking of the turntable's stylus through the grooves. The 'MS' is one of two models that differ in size and, hence, weight. The MS model weighs in at 440g while its bigger brother, the STB-HW (£255.33) is almost Grecian in its tall, colonnade-like, structure and weighs a hefty 790g which

supports the fact that both need to be reviewed in a demo before you buy, to see which stabiliser best suits your system.

The Vinyl Stabiliser can be further tweaked, however, because the two outer rings can be screwed off and the column-like weights removed, one at a time, to vary the weight to suit your turntable. Hence, upon buying, you need to listen to the unit with all the weights on, off, then add one or two at a time to find the optimum sound quality for your system. There are ten component parts, so there's a fair amount of testing to be done.

Finally, for those who have a collection of dinked, jukebox singles with no spindle holder, one end of the MS can fit into the vacated hole. Just flip the unit over to access this moulding.

Sound-testing with the jazz piece, 'Chet Baker Sings', using all of the weights within the MS as a preferred configuration, the music gathered a greater stability. The weight pressed the vinyl to the platter, enhancing the connection to it, reducing distortive effects and wavering sonics in the process. In doing so, the MS

afforded the music a much greater sense of authority with an improved overall focus, while Baker's voice was richer in tone. Bass, meanwhile, was massive in terms of the space that it occupied, providing a commanding presence.

The compressed King Crimson LP track, 'Three Of A Perfect Pair', provided a similarly dominating bass offering, with more effective percussion being displayed via crisper drum strikes. Wayward sonic elements as well as lifting mids were noticeably corralled, organising the soundstage and enhancing the overall 3D effect. Vocal harmonies were cleaner, while instrumental separation improved clarity.

One of the easiest but most effective turntable upgrades that I've heard for some time. A broad boost to analogue sound quality. **PR**

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soundbites

ILFORD ANTISTATIC CLOTH £9.99

A cloth is a cloth...is it not? When designed for use with technology, apparently not. Ilford's Antistatic Cloth is a 350mm cotton square that differs from many other cleaning cloths aimed at the technology enthusiast because it has been, "...impregnated with a unique cleaning agent developed by Ilford..."

No one is saying what that cleaning agent is, mind you – it could be a unique, technologically advanced substance or a quick blast of Mr Sheen – but the upshot of its inclusion is that, when you clean or polish a surface, it doesn't just remove the dirt but it also reduces the risk of even more dust being attracted to that surface by maintaining a static free area.

The cloth itself arrives in a resealable plastic bag which should follow the cloth everywhere it goes. It helps to maintain the condition of the cloth, prevents it from becoming

dusty (and, hence, stopping you adding new dust when you should be removing it) but also helps to retain that mysterious 'cleaning agent'. Of course, Ilford being Ilford, this cleaning cloth can be used for cleaning computer monitors, touch screens, laptops, tablets and a million other items but we are interested in hi-fi and, in my case, vinyl records.

I approached my dusty vinyl with a little bit of trepidation because applying pressure with any sort of cloth can be a dangerous activity. I have known cloths in the past to actually abrade the surface, albeit in a minor way. I had no fears with the Ilford cloth. This product is designed to also clean delicate film negatives, so it is very kind to fragile surfaces, including vinyl records.

Gently applying the cloth to the surface of my test record, I was surprised at how effective it was as a dust grabber. Lifting the cloth away from the record resulted in a perfectly clean surface. Competing cloths sometimes leave a slight

residue which means that a second application is necessary which then makes you wonder just how much micro-dirt is left of the surface. The Ilford cloth allows cleaning with more confidence. Of course, this cloth will not replace more thorough cleaning via record cleaning machines, for example, but it is an ideal partner for those records that have been thoroughly cleaned by a RCM and then later appear with a thin coating of dust. As such, the Ilford cloth slows down dust recontamination. A useful addition to the audiophile toolbox. **PR**

[Contact: +44 (0)1565 684000
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Royal sound

With the Wyndson Creek offer a classy phono stage that caters for all cartridges. Tony Bolton liked its pedigree.



Since its foundation in 1982 Creek Audio has always kept faith with us vinyl aficionados. Even in the dark days of the late '80s and through the '90s when others talked openly of the format's demise Creek have always offered both moving coil and moving magnet phono stages with their amplifiers and have produced, in more recent years, the OBH series of free-standing phono stages. However, it has taken until this year for the Company to introduce what they describe as a "no compromise stand-alone product", the Wyndson under review here.

It comes in two boxes, available in either silver or black, the smaller of the two (measuring 112 x 62 x 195mm) being the power supply. Inside are two toroidal mains transformers which provide independent power to the analogue signal and the logic switching and display circuits. Power connects via a supplied cable to the phono stage which is housed in a 192 x 62 x 195mm box. The connecting cable is long enough to site the power supply on a separate shelf should you require. I had them placed about five inches apart on the same shelf and noticed no hum or interference problems.

The front of the phono stage has a couple of buttons and a knob that can be both turned and pressed. By using this and the

appropriate buttons it is possible to access five different levels of gain and input resistance, and four stages of capacitance. The unit can accommodate several different pre-sets, which can also be labelled with up to sixteen characters each. All of this is read on the vacuum fluorescent display whose brightness can be varied to four levels or switched off entirely.

The back has a power switch above the DC input socket and the usual gold plated phono sockets for input and output. Alongside the former are a pair of miniature DIN sockets which allows for the connection of pickup arms in a balanced configuration. Suitable plugs are provided (both types of connection cannot be used at the same time).

The internal components are housed on separate multi-layer circuit boards that connect directly to the input and output sockets. The RIAA stage is divided into three parts with a passive 75 μ S de-emphasis filter in the front. The 318 μ S and 3180 μ S equalisation is performed by a high grade op-amp and there is a passive IEC low frequency roll off to follow. Another op-amp gain stage drives the output with a 50 Ohm impedance allowing for the use of long interconnects.

I set up the Wyndson in my upstairs system where it took over from the similarly priced Luxman

E200 phono stage, and was fed by the Sondek. After about twenty hours of playing I felt that the sound was stable so started listening in greater depth.

I started off with Elgar's 'Enigma Variations' as performed by the Philharmonia under the baton of Barbirolli. I found that I could not help but be impressed by the seemingly effortless way that the music flowed to the extent that I had got as far as the ninth variation, commonly known as 'Nimrod' and realised that I had not taken a single written note. There was something inherently right about the sound. The differing shades of instrumental timbre were well displayed, with strings in particular having just the right degree of rasp of bow on gut to be believable. The final crescendo before the music relaxes and quietens was handled very well, lifting me along with it, almost like being picked up by a strong tide and left deposited on a beach.

The following day I was in a more uptempo mood and ended up playing some quite hard driving R and B courtesy of Manfred Mann. If you have only heard their chart material such as 'Doo Wah Diddy Diddy' then the LP 'The Five Faces Of Manfred Mann' would prove a revelation. Away from the charts the band played covers of Howlin' Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightening' and Muddy Water's 'Got My Mojo Working' propelled along



Balanced inputs via mini DIN sockets are provided as an alternative to unbalanced phono sockets. Balanced offers best quality with no hum.

by Tom McGuinness's bass guitar and Mike Hugg's drums, with vocals and harmonica fills provided by Paul Jones. It is raw and vibrant and the WyndSOR transmitted this as effortlessly as it had glided through the smoothness of Elgar. The sound was punchy and very direct, capturing the energy and enthusiasm of the band for the music.

The record is in near mint condition, so although there was no stereo/ mono switch fitted to the phono stage, surface noise was not a problem. I later tried some rather more well played mono records and found the WyndSOR to be very well behaved in this respect. Most noises disappeared so quickly that they were not worthy of comment, although a couple of records played with a gentle background sizzle of frying bacon – but I was trying to provoke a reaction at the time.

I returned to stereo for the last record, the Orb's 12 inch EP 'Perpetual Dawn'. This early excursion into electronica was taken from the LP 'Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld' and features a reggae influenced rhythm, vocals by Jeffrey Nelson and Shola, as well as a range of both sampled and real instruments. The soundstage was both wide and deep, allowing sounds to be placed in their own bit of space with me being able to appreciate

the air inbetween them. The vocals, for instance, were very firmly placed in the centre and to the mid right. Sampled effects appeared at various points of the space in front of me, all combining with the rolling rhythm to make for a very engaging listen.

CONCLUSION

I was very impressed with the Creek WyndSOR, feeling it has lived up to the company's intention of providing a no compromise, high end phono stage. It is one of the most flexible that I have met at this price point and offers a very clean and fast sound that also manages to engage the emotions quite effortlessly.

Compared with the Luxman E200 it provided a more forward and brighter lit sound that worked well with the Clearaudio Concept, but was a little too forward with a bright sounding cartridge from the likes of Audio Technica or Lyra. I would suggest the less explicit sounding Ortofonos and Benz Micros as being very good partners to the WyndSOR.

I liked the build quality and thoroughly

enjoyed the sound and can only recommend that you place it high on the auditions list. I feel it justifies every penny of the £1500 price tag.

MUSIC USED:
 Elgar 'Enigma Variations' Sir John Barbirolli conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra. His Master's Voice. ASD 548. 1963.
 Manfred Mann. 'The Five Faces Of Manfred Mann'. His Master's Voice. CLP 1731. 1964.
 The Orb. 'Perpetual Dawn'. Waul Mr Mudo records. BLR T46. 1991.

SYSTEM USED:
 Linn Sondak/ Hadcock 242 Cryo/ Clearaudio Concept MC.
 Bent Audio TAP-X passive pre-amp.
 2 x Quad 303 power amps.
 Kelly KT 3 loudspeakers.

VERDICT ●●●●●
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FOR
 - open and airy sound.
 - large soundstage.
 - good with mono records
AGAINST
 - nothing that I found



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

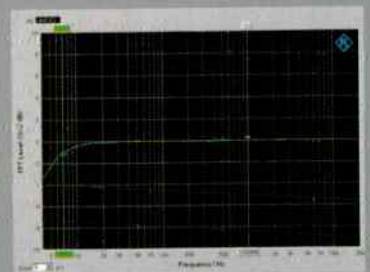
Equalisation was absolutely accurate right across the audio band with RIAA selected, within less than 0.1dB, an unusual result. Most phono stages have slightly rising treble to add just a little bit of extra apparent detail, so the WyndSOR will have a tad less sheen to it than many rivals, but it is truthful and Creek have obviously gone to some lengths to get this right. Selecting IEC inserts a warp filter but the IEC recommendation is drastic and audibly cuts bass. Measurement showed bass rolled-off below 100Hz, and was -1dB down at 50Hz, but suppression at warp frequencies below 10Hz was high at greater than -10dB. Because MM and MC use the same amplifier equalisation was identical for MM and MC.

The gain range was very high: x117 (41dB) for high output MM up to x3340 (70dB) for low output MC, enough for all models on the market. Equivalent input noise was very low at 0.06µV for MC and 0.25µV for MM, figures up with the best so hiss will be inaudible. Output overload measured 10V making input overloads satisfactory (output divided by gain).

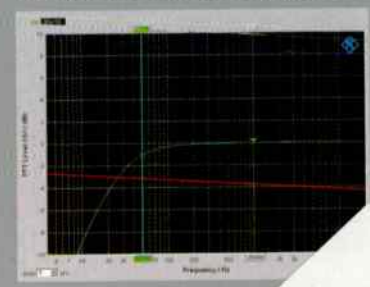
The WyndSOR is a flexible phono stage with a lot of options and it is very accurate. It is quiet too, so measures well all round. NK

Frequency response	8Hz-20kHz
Separation	70dB
Noise (MC, MM)	0.06µV, 0.25µV
Distortion	0.002%
Gain MM	x117, x193, x480
MC	x477, x1210, x3340
Overload	10V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



FREQUENCY RESPONSE, IEC



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Work of art

Tony Bolton thinks the Da Vinci moving coil cartridge from Clearaudio is a work of art. And you pay the price!

Regular readers will know that I run a Clearaudio Master Solution Turntable, currently fitted with their recently introduced Magnify tonearm. I normally run it with either a Benz Micro or an Ortofon cartridge. I have tried various Clearaudios over the years, and while I respect them greatly, I have never quite got on with the tonal balance, finding them a little too bright for my taste and personal use.

I was therefore quite interested to hear that the Company have introduced V2 versions of their high end moving coil range which starts with the Talisman V2 costing £1070, and goes up to the Goldfinger Statement at £8850. Third in line down from this (or fourth up from the bottom, if you prefer) is the £4050 Da Vinci V2.

The aluminium body is coated with a 30 micron thick ceramic layer in an attractive red colour. This, combined with the resonance dispersion fingers that project from the top makes for an eye catching design. The long boron cantilever emerges from a cave like hole in the front of the body, and is tipped with a Micro HD stylus. Inside are 8 of what are claimed to be the most powerful magnets available in that size, arranged symmetrically. The gold coils are directly attached to the end of the cantilever and positioned to the front and rear sides of the pivot point. This arrangement is claimed to give low distortion and increased dynamic range.

Having been advised that the cartridge was thoroughly run in, I attached it to the Magnify, balanced it out at the recommended 2.8 grams tracking force and set the Leema Agena phonostage to 200 ohms impedance. I was in the mood for gently flowing electronica so started off with Air's first LP, 'Premier Symptomes'. This pressing is the 1999 re-release of the '97 original, and features two extra tracks. Essentially it is a compilation of their early singles released between 1995 and '97, all of which are based around Moog synthesizers, the Korg MS-20, a Wurlitzer and a Vocoder. With these tools they weave a relaxing web of floating sounds that the Da Vinci translated into a beautifully defined, spacious and colourful image. It was music to close your eyes to, and just let wash over you. It felt absolutely blissful, the sonic equivalent of relaxing in front of a sunset on the perfect tropical isle.

This was a contrast with the last high end Clearaudio cartridge that I tried some years ago, where I felt that it seemed to show off its high frequency definition. This one had a well lit top end but it was far more balanced in relation to the rest of the sounds.

The next record that came to hand was simply titled 'Peter Tchaikovsky. Herbert Von Karajan'



and was a DG promo issued in 1967. One side is devoted to the 'Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture', which, under that particular baton, is a very lush sound. The Da Vinci filled the room with the BPO. The soundstage was very large, and seemed to go back right through the walls of the room. I almost felt able to describe the size of the recording venue, such was the level of micro-detail floating out of the Urso Majors.

I was also aware of the twin subwoofer cones in their lower cabinets getting a little more exercise than usual, with double basses and cellos sounding both deep and well controlled. The build up from a solo instrument to the full orchestra was handled well. It felt fast and thrilling, but unlike earlier models, I felt as though there was more grip on the various instrumental components, so that the effect was more realistic and gained greater emotional intensity because of this.

The next day found me in the mood for one my favourite jazz performers, Fats Waller. I acquired this record in my mid teens when my school record library was having a clear out. It bears a few scars left by other users and the Da Vinci made me aware of them, but didn't make them the focus of my attention. What

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MUSIC USED:

Tchaikovsky 'Peter Tchaikovsky, Herbert Von Karajan.' Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted Herbert Von Karajan. Deutsche Grammophon. 104 811. 1967.

Fats Waller. 'The Vocal Fats Waller'. RCA Victor Records. LSA 3112. 1972.

Fleetwood Mac. 'Rumours'. Warner Brothers Records. BSK 3010. 1977.

Air. 'Premiers Symptomes'. Source Records. 7243 8472451 1. 1997.

clicks there were passed very quickly and I was able to focus my attention on listening to the impressive levels of detail that were being drawn from a collection of 78 transcriptions. It was energetic and rhythmically very tight, with Zutty Singleton's drum solo and Waller's stride piano finale to 'Ain't Misbehavin' almost bouncing around the room.

After this I was in the mood for more excitement so put on 'The Chain' from Fleetwood Mac's 'Rumours'. I think even Jensen Button would have approved of the speed

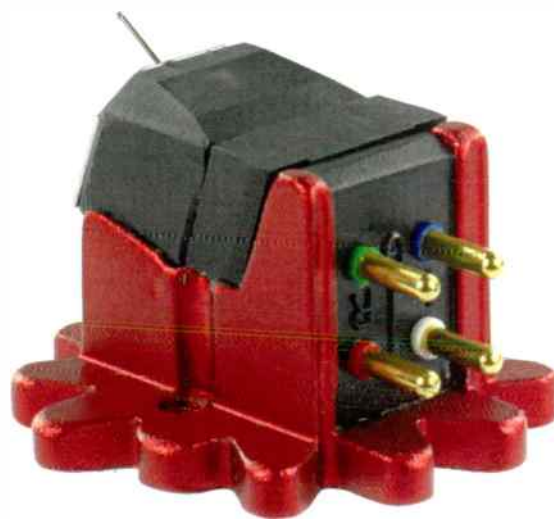
get the pulse racing. At the other end of the musical scale, it can reproduce the sweetness and delicacy of the string sound that Von Karajan can draw out of the BPO.

I felt that the bass was well controlled, with, to follow the racing simile, vivid acceleration, taut braking and a fearsome grip on the corners. While the midrange sat quite nicely balanced like a fulcrum, in between these two points.

There were a couple of occasions where surface noise intruded on worn records, but

mostly I was aware of it only briefly. This cartridge may not flatter tired records, but it has an open handed honesty that is hard to dislike.

It may not suit all tastes, but then, nothing does. So if you want a bit of carefully administered adrenalin in your sound then look no further than the Da Vinci V2. It provides excitement combined with control which can make it very addictive listening. I suggest that you start saving your pennies and book a demonstration.



"absolutely blissful, the sonic equivalent of relaxing in front of a sunset on the perfect tropical isle"

and precision with which, what most now think of as the Formula 1 theme, raced out of the speakers. The opening guitar riff hung in the air for a moment, repeated, then rushed headlong towards the vocal and guitar blended finish line. The guitar sounds had an edge as polished as a scalpel, wielded with the dexterity of a surgeon, and as the layers of music built, I just felt the intensity of the sound rise, but without clutter or confusion.

As you realise, I have taken quite a shine to this cartridge. I think this new version improves on older models in a lot of ways, while building on their strengths. The high frequencies seem to be a lot smoother and integrate with the rest of the frequency range better than previously, while retaining the ability to create sounds that can

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Da Vinci shows the usual flat midband associated with moving coil cartridges, but treble peaks up at 10kHz due to tip mass resonance. The lift of +4dB is enough to give an obviously bright balance, in keeping with other Clearaudio cartridges. As many moving coils measure flat these days the Da Vinci offers an alternative to those that want it. Inner groove tracing loss (red trace) was minimal, and not enough to lessen the treble peak by any appreciable degree. This will emphasise inner groove noise and distortion, however, and may well not flatter old records.

Tracking was very good at low frequencies and in the midband. The Da Vinci only baulked at the highest level 'torture' track of 25cms/sec at 1kHz, skating right over it. When it lets go it jumps out of the groove, even at 2.8gms tracking force, but this will be unlikely to happen in use.

Vertical tracking angle was very high, well over 30 degrees, resulting in 5% distortion on vertical modulation, where 1% is possible. As this is mostly second harmonic it isn't as bad sonically as it seems in measured terms, but quality moving coils usually manage better.

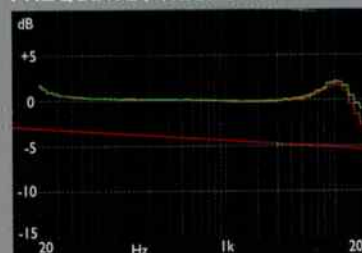
Output was very high as moving coils go, no less than 1mV at 5cms/sec rms. As the recommended load is high at 300 Ohms it would appear that

Clearaudio have used more coil turns than usual to get high output. As most MC stages have a 100 Ohm input some of this may get lost, but frequency response is not affected measurement on a lower load showed.

The Da Vinci turns in a reasonably good set of results, but it does not match the best even in lower price bands. Along with Lyras it is for those who want a brighter balance. NK

Tracking force	2.8gms
Weight	7gms
Vertical tracking angle	>30degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 10kHz
Channel separation	23dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	90µm
vortical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	20cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	0.5%
vertical	5.6%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	1mV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



VERDICT

High end cartridge with musical and vibrant nature.

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Audio Reference

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FOR

- fast and exciting sound.
- excellent imaging.
- powerful and deep bass.
- clear and smooth treble.

AGAINST

- price.
- may be a little forward for some tastes.

SYSTEM USED:

Clearaudio Master Solution turntable/Magnify arm.

Leema Acoustics Agena phonostage/Tucana II amplifier.

Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.

Clear advantage

The clear acrylic bodywork of SRM's Athena turntable gives it an eye catching advantage. Tony Bolton wonders whether it sounds as good as it looks.

SRM Tech, based in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, have long been known as suppliers of various upgrade components for Linn, Thorens and Rega turntables, as well as having an association with the Moth Group, who make arms and record cleaning machines. They also make their own turntables, the Arezzo, reviewed by Adam Smith as part of a £2000 turntable group test in the May 2011 edition of this magazine, and the Athena (£788) reviewed here.

Introduced approximately three years ago, the Athena is a striking looking deck consisting of two layers of 10mm thick clear acrylic separated by Sorbothane cones. During transit these are clamped together with a bolt that must be removed before use. The top layer has an extension at the back which supports the EL-1 tonearm. This is a modified Rega RB251 unit that comes with a Sorbothane filled rear stub, damped finger lift and a Counterweight Resonance Controller. This latter is a band which is stretched around the

counterweight.

Underneath the deck are three cones which sit in cups. The review sample had the optional isolation platform with it, costing £109. This consists of a black acrylic plinth which has recesses machined in to accommodate the spike cups. There are also three Sorbothane feet provided which simply adhere themselves to the underneath of the plinth.

An external power supply unit connects to a mains plug mounted transformer and to a long lead affixed to the motor. The PSU has a rocker switch on the top for power. It is a lightweight plastic box that some users may wish to Blu Tak to a shelf to stop it being moved by the weight of the attached cables. It can be upgraded to the High Current Power Supply for an additional £399.

The motor unit, pulley, belts and electronics are the same as those fitted to the more expensive Arezzo turntable. The drive system is unusual in using a pair of drive belts to propel the platter around for 33 rpm, but only one belt for 45. These belts sit around a machined polymer subplatter, an improvement over the original design that was introduced 18 months ago.

On top of this sits a small platter isolating disc which grips the outer platter quite firmly. The 10mm thick acrylic outer platter is covered by a thick Arezzo platter mat which seems to provide a good support for the record.

This example came without a cartridge fitted to allow me to use my reference Benz Micro Ace L moving coil. SRM Tech will supply

a choice of cartridges for extra should you require. Having set it all up I left it running for 48 hours as per the instructions, to let the motor and bearing bed in, before I started listening.

By this time it was late evening so some Chopin Nocturnes, performed by Van Cliburn seemed an appropriate way to start. This Texan pianist shot to fame in 1958 at the age of 23 when he won the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow. RCA Victor promptly signed him and over the next few years produced a series of highly regarded recordings. This LP includes Polonaises, Etudes and 'Nocturne No. 17 in B'. With its long, slow, drawn out notes and gentle pacing, it is a good track for displaying any speed stability problems in a turntable.

I am pleased to say that the Athena performed excellently and I was unaware of any fluctuation in pitch. Out of interest, I removed the platter isolating disc from the inner platter and played the track again. I found very slight signs of speed instability with a fractional waver in the pitch of some of the piano chords. Having restored normal performance I carried on listening. Given the fairly lightweight construction of the deck I was pleasantly surprised at the depth and solidity of the sound of the piano. Lower registers were well shaped, as were the mid range and treble, which proved free of uncouth jangles and ringing. The sound was very clear and precise although I did feel that it had a slightly reserved air to it.

The following day I dug out a





"cool headed analysis combined with a seemingly insatiable appetite for anything with a beat"

record that takes my love of jazz near to its limits, but also encompasses my liking for Indian music. 'Indo-Jazz Fusions II' is a combination of late '60s avant-garde jazz married with traditional Indian instruments and rhythms. The description does not do the recording justice. I find it a fascinating record to listen to, with unusual pairing of instruments such as trumpet and flugelhorn intertwining with sitar and tabla. As soon as the beat got going the Athena seemed to come to life a bit more, injecting a little frisson of excitement into the proceedings. The Indian rhythmic form of 12 beats

divided 3, 2, 3, 4 were joined by Jackie Duggan on drums playing in 3/4 time, around which Keshav Sathe wove his tabla rhythm.

The staging of this recording is also unusual with the two culture's instruments alternating across the width of the soundstage. This can result in a piano being on the far left, accompanying a tambura or flute which is situated in the mid-right. It certainly demonstrates the spacial capabilities of stereo, and the Athena proved up to the job, providing a wide arena in which the musicians could perform.

Having satiated my appetite

for Eastern sounds I crossed the oceans to Andy Warhol's 'Factory' and put on the Velvet Underground's





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MUSIC USED:
 Van Cliburn. 'My Favourite Chopin'. RCA Victor Records. SB-2143. 1962.
 Joe Harriott - John Mayer Double Quintet. 'Indo-Jazz Fusions II'. Columbia Records. SCX 6215. 1968.
 The Velvet Underground. 'The Velvet Underground and Nico'. Polydor Records. SPELP 20. 1967.
 Ozric Tentacles. 'Strangeitude'. Dovetail Records. DOVE LP 3. 1991.

first LP. This is the one with the banana on the front cover, and opens with 'Sunday Morning' being gently introduced by John Cale playing the celesta. Lou Reed's unmistakable vocals, with Nico doing the backing, gently lower the listener into a relaxed frame of mind before some of the grittier sounds and lyrics intrude in the next track. It has quite a dark sound overall and the Athena did a good job at transmitting this, allowing the rhythm to roll along gently yet capturing the incisiveness of Reed's guitar.

I have played this on some turntables that seemed to miss out on the almost Gothic darkness of the sound, rendering it insubstantial and lacking in intensity. The Athena did a good job in maintaining these characteristics of the music, but at the same time opening the sound up to be analysed.

It managed the same trick on the next record, the Ozric Tentacles third LP 'Strangeitude'. The opening track 'White Rhino Tea' starts with a light guitar riff before power chords break in and the beat starts. This sort of psychedelic rock, fused with both live instruments and samples seemed to suit this turntable and it relayed the music with great gusto. The music should sound exciting and vibrant, leading the listener on a journey into some very strange spaces, some of which seem to help make sense of

the LP cover art. The thumping bass lines were well described and served to drive the music along at quite a pace. The eclectic mixture of arpeggiated synthesizers, effects, electric and acoustic guitars, flutes, recorders, xylophones and sampled voices were displayed in a way that allowed me to investigate them while retaining their unity as part of a piece of music.

I found this deck to be an interesting combination of cool headed analysis combined with a seemingly insatiable appetite for anything with a beat. Apart from the records mentioned above I have tried it with New Orleans and swing styles of jazz, '50s rock 'n' roll, sixties pop and modern electronic dance music. All of it was replayed with an infectious enthusiasm for the rhythmic energy of the music. When things slow down a bit I felt that there was a lessening of interest – if it were human I would say it got a little bored with slower music. It was still reproduced in great detail but there seemed to be a tendency to produce an overly smooth sound that had moments of seeming to be twiddling it's thumbs a little waiting for the action to start. Slower tracks were still very enjoyable but I think slightly miss this deck's raison d'être. It has an analytical nature and slower tunes allowed this to come to the fore. Faster music was also analysed, but part of that analysis included a quite vivid description of the driving forces

behind beat orientated music.

I liked the way it managed to do this without sounding boisterous or vulgar in its descriptiveness; good manners were retained throughout regardless of musical genre. If my musical diet was solely pensive classical sounds then I might be tempted to look elsewhere, however a more outgoing track such as the 'Grand March' from Aida would have enough drive to get the Athena's interest aroused.

Overall a very good record player that is well presented and thought out, and that offers sonic agility combined with gentlemanly behaviour. One for the audition shortlist.

SYSTEM USED
 Benz Micro Ace L cartridge.
 Luxman E200 phonostage.
 Bent Audio TAP-X passive pre-amp.
 2 x Quad 303 power amps.
 Kelly KT3 loudspeakers.

VERDICT ●●●●●
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 - good imaging.
- AGAINST**
- can lose interest in slower moving sounds

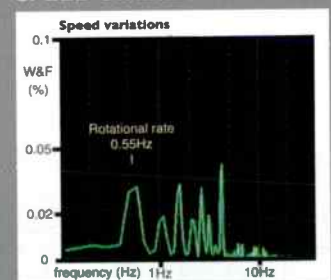
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Athena's speed was just 0.1% fast, a minuscule error as belt drives go, so it is pitch accurate. Basic wow at 0.55H, the rotational rate, was also very low, our analysis shows in the peak at left. Wow measured 0.1%, rather better than the 0.2% that is common. There were some higher rate wow components and flutter measured a little higher than usual at 0.13% (0.08% is common), but this is hard to detect. DIN Weighed W&F as a result was good at 0.1%, almost down to Direct Drive standards.

W&F unwtd	0.15%
W&F DIN wtd	0.1%
Speed	+0.1%

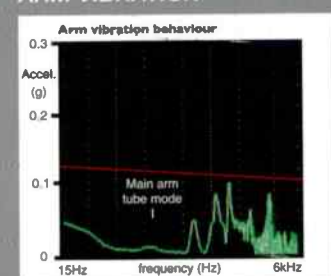
The EL-1 arm, a tuned Rega OEM251, was fundamentally stiff and resonance free, turning in a great result in terms of first bending mode, which was all but absent; only a small hump can be seen at 220Hz. The usual Rega liveliness above 1kHz is visible, an effect associated with its headshell platform. However, the headshell was resonance free above 5kHz.

SPEED STABILITY



The EL-1 arm worked well, our vibration analysis showed, and the turntable puts up a good result in terms of basic speed stability. NK

ARM VIBRATION



Wow	0.12%
Flutter	0.13%





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Cable Cocktail

Paul Rigby reviews Red Velvet and Black Curse interconnect cables, and Black Curse loudspeaker cables, from the Vermouth Audio.

Distributed via Mains Cables R Us in the UK, the Vermouth range of cables stem from Jakarta, Indonesia. They offer a considered design that promises to compete within the already crowded budget and midrange cable arena.

The Black Curse speaker cables fit into that midrange sector. The company says they are made from Ultra Pure OFC: that's Oxygen Free copper, to you and me, but with Teflon

insulation. You'll also find a High Grade, Flexible PVC insulation containing soft stranded cotton. Enigmatically, one end of the cables are terminated in spades while the other end is terminated in banana plugs. Another intriguing element is that all terminations feature rhodium plating.

The Black Curse interconnects use silver plated copper conductors and gold RCA plugs while the Red Velvet interconnects are based upon a pure copper litz conductor surrounded by air tubing with a Teflon and aluminium foil. The review pair had silver plated terminations.

SOUND QUALITY

Beginning with the most expensive cables of the three, the Black Curse speaker cables, and comparing them to my Tellurium Q Blue reference, I played King Crimson's rather compressed sounding prog vinyl, 'Three Of A Perfect Pair'. The cables offered a wide, deep and impressive soundstage that forged a complementary big rock sound, accompanied by an informative midrange. The mids didn't dampen the compression but were effectively cushioned by a tight bass.

Onto 'Chet Baker Sings' which, in a calmer, less rock-centric

environment, revealed Baker's jazz trumpet to lack a degree of engagement and emotion, an aspect that might have been influenced by the Rhodium termination. Yet, there was an agreeable attention to detail that was almost embossed upon the soundstage, giving a slightly clinical edge to the presentation which will please those audiophiles who like to fully explore the mix. Bass was also lifted to provide a rock solid foundation.

Using my Chord Anthem 2s as a reference, I tested the Red Velvet interconnects with a range of compressed pop CDs. Backed by an expansive soundstage, the low frequencies were rather recessed but that was offset by the sumptuous mids which were smooth as silk.

On Horace Silver's jazz CD, 'Cape Verdean Blues', the mids and treble revelled in a luxurious quality while the piano had an almost romantic tonality that may have lacked a little in detail retrieval but, instead, possessed a sweet musicality.

The Black Curse interconnects provided a dramatic presentation that was almost epic in nature, when playing a range of pop CDs. The extended

soundstage added a 'big show' feel but the mids still managed to retain a welcome intimacy, the cables almost pulling me into the vocalist's personal space. The lower frequencies were impressive too, providing focused, refined bass. An increase in definition helped to tame some compression effects.

On the jazz piece, 'Cape Verdean Blues', the piano was both detailed



and fleet of foot, producing enough air to allow the complex percussion room to breathe and to offer its intricate variations without appearing restrictive. The sax solo, meanwhile, benefitted from an attention to detail that contributed depth and energy to the performance.

CONCLUSION

All three cables performed well but all offered unique sound signatures. The Black Curse speaker cables offered an almost technical appreciation of the music while adding an ambitious, stadium-filling sound.

The Red Velvets may appeal to jazz and classical audiophiles, providing a sound that, although never mercurial, was certainly knowing. These are cables that will never produce any nasty shocks.

The Black Curse interconnects were the surprise gem of the three. Providing a sparkling performance, this cable was the best balanced of the trio, providing superb value for money.

VERDICT ●●●●● £
VERMOUTH AUDIO
BLACK CURSE STEREO
INTERCONNECTS £45 PER
METRE

A surprisingly insightful cable for the price, with a detailed midrange and focused bass.

FOR

- dynamic
- wide soundstage
- tight bass
- intimate mids

AGAINST

- nothing

VERDICT ●●●●●

VERMOUTH AUDIO
RED VELVET STEREO
INTERCONNECTS £81.50 PER
METRE

A sweet sounding interconnect offering an impressive soundstage with a cultured and urbane performance.

FOR

- sweet mids
- wide soundstage
- civilised presentation

AGAINST

- recessed bass
- rolled off treble

VERDICT ●●●●●

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AGAINST

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Alan Sircom, HIFI+ magazine

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Ken Kessler, Hi-fi News July 2012



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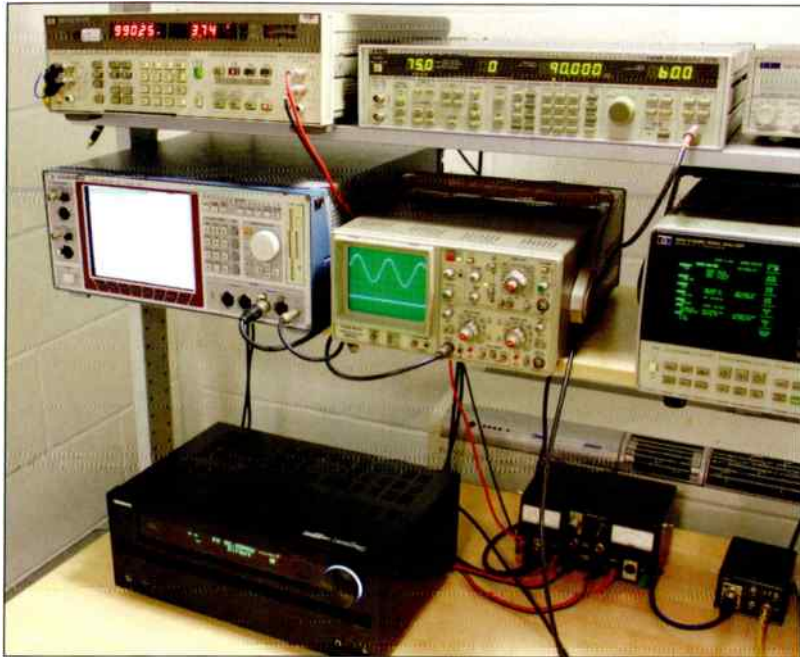
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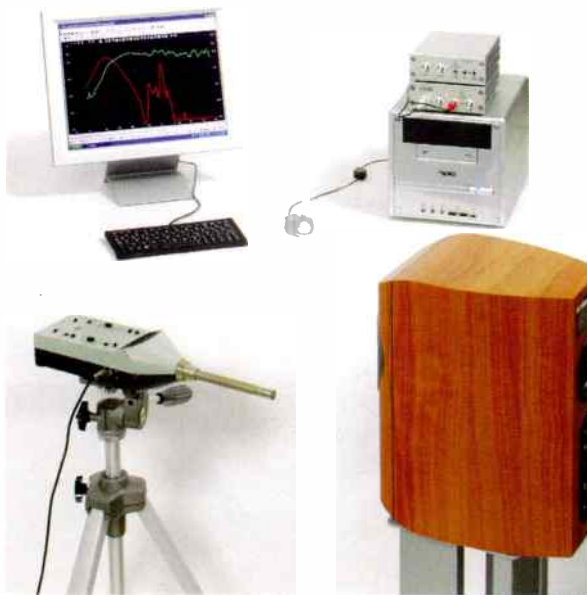
WORLD STANDARD TESTS

*How we perform all the tests, and what they mean, is detailed on our website: www.hi-fiworld.co.uk. Go to the **product category** (e.g. Loudspeakers), then **Tests**.*

Hi-Fi World tests all products before they are reviewed. Many fail this first hurdle, rejected for a variety of faults. Pre-testing is crucial but only Hi-Fi World does it. For those products that pass, our measurements give our reviewers invaluable information about behaviour. Hi-Fi World is the only magazine, worldwide, sufficiently well equipped to be able to apply comprehensive tests in all product categories. Here's how we do it...

LOUDSPEAKERS

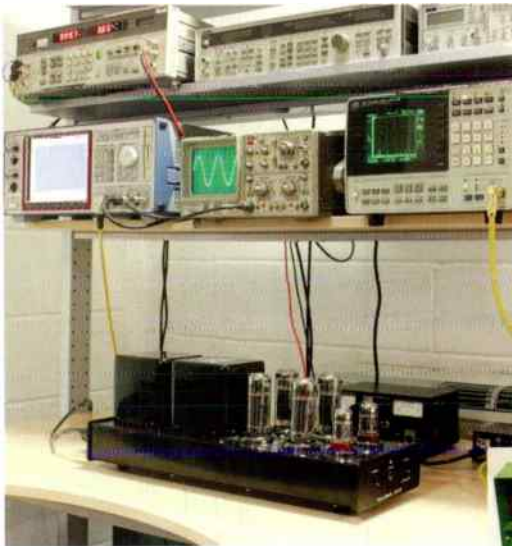
Loudspeakers are tested with the industry standard Clio measurement system from Audiomatica of Italy, giving results understood and accepted by manufacturers worldwide. Measuring microphones are a Bruel & Kjaer mic. capsule on a B&K SPL meter and an Audiomatica microphone. Our tests include decay plots and coloured contour maps, as well as unique distortion measurement that provides valuable insight into bass behaviour. See our website www.hi-fiworld/loudspeakers/tests for more detail.



PICKUP ARMS

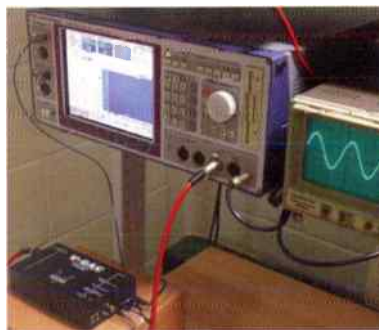
Our unique arm vibration tests are made using a special miniature Bruel & Kjaer accelerometer attached to the arm's headshell, at the cartridge mounting position, as our picture shows. This reveals arm tube bending modes and high frequency vibrations in the headshell, that degrade sound.





AMPLIFIERS

Amplifiers are connected to large resistive loads, 8 ohms and 4 ohms, and all parameters including power and distortion are measured by a Rohde & Schwarz UPL, the world's most advanced audio analyser. The loads are custom built to our specification, able to absorb 200 Watts without generating high frequency distortion due to magnetic hysteresis caused by iron content in the wire. This allows us to measure crossover distortion at 10kHz accurately and understand its influence upon sound.



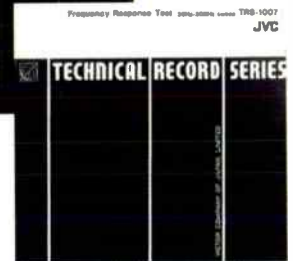
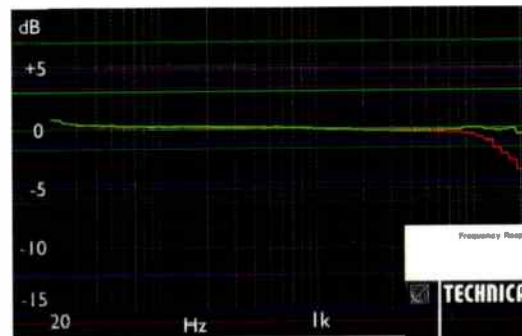
DIGITAL CONVERTORS

DACs are connected to the digital signal generator of our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser and their analogue output sent to the analyser for analysis. We can measure all parameters and even pre-jitter the signal to test effectiveness of re-clocking, allowing us to uniquely determine impact on sound quality.



TURNTABLES

Analysing turntable speed stability is thorny. We have just bought a Kenwood 180FL Wow & Flutter meter to get a high resolution analysis from its frequency demodulated speed stability output, important to see what Direct Drives are really doing.



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To measure pickup cartridges you need an accurate test disc – and there is only one, JVC TRS-1007. We have two of them. It was cut at half speed and needs special equalisation, but is super accurate. That is why our cartridge measurements are of unparalleled accuracy, matching those of Ortofon for example, who also use TRS-1007.



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CD player, excellent condi-
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NEXT MONTH

There is another way to enjoy AV than wrestle with a huge receiver in which video takes precedence and audio takes a digital battering. Next month we will be reviewing the Audiolab 8200 AP AV preamplifier, where sound quality reigns supreme. You will be surprised at just how different the AV experience can be. We also hope to bring you the following -

LOUDSPEAKERS

Triangle Quartet
Wharfedale Denton
Accolade Model 5
Spendor S100

KEF LS50

Dali Epicon 6
Usher Dancer Mini Two

VINYL

Nova Phenomena phono stage
Avid Pellar phono stage

AMPLIFICATION

WAD KT88 valve amplifier
Meridian 818 Reference Audio Core/Pre-Amplifier
Audiolab 8200 AP AV preamplifier

DIGITAL

NAD M51 DAC
Chord Index streamer
Rega CD Player
Sony BDP-S790 Blu-ray player

FEATURE

History of Wharfedale book review



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ADVERTISERS INDEX

2nd Hand Hi-Fi	86
Absolute Sounds	OBC
Avid Hi-Fi	78
Basically Sound	40
Billy Vee	98
Black Rhodium	76
Enjoy The Music.Com	98
Epiphany Acoustics	94
Exposure	52
Furutech	40
Heatherdale Audio	80
Henley Designs	44,45,74
Hi-Fi Racks	26
Hi-Fi Sound	86
IAG	10
Ian Harrison	88
Icon Audio	42
Inspire Hi-Fi	54
Isokinetik	40
Kog Audio	102
Leema Acoustics	92
Mains Cables R Us	94
Midland Audio Exchange	94
Music First	88
Naim Audio	56
Nu Nu Distribution	22,100
Origin Live	48
Oriton	18
PMC	6
QAT	62
Retro Reproduction	88
Select Audio	24
Sevenoaks	103,104,105
SME	48
Sound Fowndations	IFC
Sound Hi-Fi	80
Tannoy	30
Tellurium Q	14
The Electric Multiroom	98
Turntable World	86
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ROXY MUSIC

THE COMPLETE STUDIO RECORDINGS 1972-1982

VIRGIN

“on holiday in Portugal we met these huge German girls on the beach, Constanza and Evaline, who had enormous shoulders. Bryan said, ‘Let’s use them’”

I’ve been considering including Roxy Music as part of Classic Cuts column for some time but, as soon as I heard that this project was under development, I decided to wait a bit because all of the band’s classics can now be found within one column. Why? Well, if you take a peek within this box set, you will see that it contains all eight Roxy Music studio albums: ‘Roxy Music’, ‘For Your Pleasure’, ‘Stranded’, ‘Country Life’, ‘Siren’, ‘Manifesto’, ‘Flesh And Blood’ and ‘Avalon’ plus two extra discs which feature non-album singles, B-sides and remixes, many of which appear in CD for the first time. That includes the USA 7” mix of ‘Love Is the Drug’, a live cut of ‘For Your Pleasure’, a Canadian Extended mix of ‘Dance Away’ and the 1981 B-side, ‘To Turn You On’.

Speaking at the time of the release of Roxy Music’s final album, ‘Avalon’, lead singer Bryan Ferry reflected on the album and the band itself. “I hate to plan things. Everything that has happened, so far, in my career is fairly intuitive. One thing has led to the next thing. I never know what the next record is going to sound like until I’m in the studio and it just starts to happen. You do sketches for songs and build some idea of what you are going to do.”

One of the most noticeable aspects of Roxy Music’s career was the image. The style of dress, for example, made a visual statement that, during the band’s early seventies’ glam period, struck a chord with

many. Their influence from the late sixties art rock movement gave Roxy Music a unique take on the ‘look’ of pop music. That image extended to the band’s sleeve art, which often featured scantily clad ladies plus other, strong illustrative imagery such as the Arthurian ‘Avalon’. Ferry was responsible for the band’s sleeve art but claimed that he didn’t paint or draw on a regular basis, “That would dilute the artistic urge, if you like. Whenever we make an album, I play at being art director for a week but I’ve always been interested in how things look”.

One example of this awareness was the – at the time – contentious sleeve art for the 1974 album, ‘Country Life’. Stylist for Roxy music, Anthony Price, remembered, “On holiday in Portugal we met these huge German girls on the beach, Constanza and Evaline, who had enormous shoulders, like a drag act. Bryan said, ‘Let’s use them’. We put them against a hedge and it was shot at night with a flash as if they’d been caught by car headlights at a country house. It could have been a picture of mad hooray girls at a party in their underwear. The typeface was made to look like a Country Life cover, which Bryan subscribed and aspired to – a clue to his bizarre character.”

One of the notable trends that you pick up as you listen through this set is the change in musical approach. There’s a definite curve that Ferry

himself spotted, “During the seventies and later into the punk music era, music was very violent but then we live in violent times. I’m drawn less to that kind of thing, at the moment. When I started, I did a lot of fairly savage things, aggressive music. Now, I am going through a period of reflection. Back to nature”.

I listened to the CDs in this pack with some trepidation because the albums have undergone a new remaster. On the whole, Virgin has done an excellent job. The soundstage for each album is magnificent. Broad, epic with cinematic quality, the instrumental separation is carefully arranged to allow every member of the group time and space, giving each track a clear, concise presentation. There has been a touch of compression, though, so it’s not all good news but what there is has not been overdone. In fact, it has been used to lift the bass and hone the upper mids. Clinical sounding CD players might not appreciate the playback but most audiophiles will find that it’s not too obtrusive. It certainly isn’t the hatchet job that Warners did on the last Smiths’, CD back catalogue remasters, for example.

It’s great to have all of these albums in one, neatly accessible pack. While fans could argue for more true rarities instead of alternative mixes, this is a welcome box of an iconic group. **PR**

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