

ver cartridge adds \$500. (Vol.39 No.10 WWW)

SOULINES KUBRICK DCX: \$4000 WITHOUT TONEARM

The Soulines Kubrick DCX, made in Serbia, lacks a plinth in the usual sense, being supported by a skeletal aluminum chassis with height-adjustable feet at the ends of three propeller-blade-like pods. Two more pods contain a low-torque DC motor and a tonearm support with interchangeable armboards, three of which are supplied: for Linn/Jelco-style mounts, SME-style mounts, and Rega arms. At the center of the chassis is a brass-and-steel inverted bearing that supports an acrylic platter so beautifully machined that AD could not tell, at a glance, whether it was spinning or still. AD used his review sample of the Kubrick DCX with his own Rega RB300 tonearm and Denon DL-103 cartridge—setup was “a breeze,” he said—and slaughtered several hundred words expressing his shock that a turntable that lacks a high-torque motor, a heavy platter, and a patina of nicotine and mold could have such a good sense of scale, “great” momentum and flow, and “better than average” bass weight and impact. His conclusion: “this is one of the very best non-vintage turntables I’ve heard outside of the enormously expensive Döhmman Helix 1.” (Vol.40 No.7 WWW)

VPI PRIME SCOUT: \$2199

When the history of domestic audio is written, the late 2010s will be remembered as a time of reinvigoration for VPI, a recent example of which is Prime Scout: a belt-drive turntable with a solid plinth, an aluminum platter, and an outboard AC motor, bundled with the company’s JMW 9 unipivot turntable. A Delrin clamp for the platter and a thread-and-weight antiskating mechanism for the arm—the latter a bit of a departure for VPI—are also included, as are an easy-to-use cartridge-alignment jig and an electronic downforce gauge. AD thought the platter clamp added an unwelcome touch of fussiness to the sound, but was otherwise impressed with the Prime Scout, praising its talents for preserving sonic colors, communicating musical drive, and “throwing a remarkably big, spacious, convincingly detailed soundstage” when playing records so inscribed. Art’s measurements, such as they were, revealed that the Prime Scout ran a little fast, and exhibited more wow than his 1950s idler-wheel Garrard, although wow was not excessive in absolute terms: wow! As AD said at the end, “As they say in New Jersey, what’s not to like?” (Vol.40 No.10 WWW)

C

PIONEER PLX-1000: \$699 INCLUDING TONEARM \$\$\$

To those who deny the musicality of direct-drive platters and the servos they rode in on, HR says: Bunk. “Forget analog vs digital or tubes vs solid-state; the most pervasive and poorly considered belief of all is that only belt-drive turntables are worthy of audiophile consideration.” From there, HR praises this successor to the popular but discontinued Technics SL-1200 Mk.2: the Pioneer PLX-1000 direct-drive turntable with integrated tonearm. “Belts can’t touch the PLX-1000’s excitement, naturally formed detail, and clearly expressed forward momentum,” he wrote. “This new Pioneer also showcases the complex tonal character and elegant structures of classical music better than any affordable belt-drive I’ve experienced.” As HR hears it, the PLX-1000, whose motor has more than twice the torque of its famous forebear, “is not only a worthy successor to the legendary Technics SL-1200MK2, it is a serious contender for the best audiophile-grade turntable for less than \$2000. Unabashedly recommended.” After a round of second-thoughtfulness, plus trials with an even greater array of partnering cartridges—including the affordable Shure SC35C—HR encouraged the bravest and most technically adept owners to check the tonearms of their PLX-1000 turntables for excessively loose bearings. Otherwise, “I could live the rest of my music-loving, record-collecting life” with the Pioneer player. (Vol.38 Nos. 3 & 7 WWW)

REGA PLANAR 3: \$1145 WITH RB330 ARM AND PRE-INSTALLED ELYS 2 MM CARTRIDGE

Forty years after introducing the original Planar 3, Rega

has dusted off that model name and applied it to a comprehensively redesigned package that includes a new tonearm (the Rega RB330), a new 24V motor, and a newly re-engineered if outwardly similar plinth that incorporates the “metalized phenolic” tonearm-to-platter-bearing top brace that characterizes Rega’s higher-end turntable models. In examining the new Planar 3, HR noted that his review sample did indeed run a bit fast, and he wondered whether some measure of the “pacey, boogie-down Rega sound” has to do with a combination of that and a microscopic “doubling” effect from the player’s lively plinth. That said, Herb wrote, “For me, the best record-playing system is the one that most vigorously directs my attention toward the humans behind the music. . . . Rega’s new Planar 3 is exceptional at doing just that.” Price includes Elys 2 moving-magnet cartridge; base price for turntable with tonearm is \$945. Optional Drive Belt (in Floridian-retiree white): \$59. (Vol.34 No.12, Vol.35 No.11, Vol.40 No.2 WWW)

SONY PS-HX500 USB: \$499.99 W/TONEARM AND MM CARTRIDGE

The Sony PS-HX500 is a USB turntable comprising: a belt-driven platter of lightweight aluminum alloy; a proprietary aluminum-alloy tonearm with an 8.7" effective length; an OEM moving-magnet cartridge; and an onboard MM phono preamp and A/D converter, the last capable of creating files of up to 24-bit/192kHz (PCM) or 5.6MHz (DSD). Described by MF as easy to set up, the Sony package exhibited disappointing speed accuracy and stability (although the latter proved inaudible, “even on sustained notes”), but its tonearm “was particularly well behaved.” MF also praised the overall sound of the Sony package, writing that the “midrange was rich and full, and the upper frequencies were smooth and also well extended, with clean, precise transients.” His conclusion: “the PS-HX500 reinforced the notion that, even at so low a price, a properly designed turntable can do some attractive analog things that no digital system at any price has yet managed.” (Vol.39 No.8 WWW)

VPI PLAYER: \$1500 \$\$\$ ★

Equal parts entry-level audiophile component and perfectionist-quality lifestyle product, the VPI Player (originally called the Nomad) bundles a wood-plattered, belt-drive turntable and 10" gimbaled tonearm with an Ortofon 2M Red cartridge and an onboard phono preamplifier designed specifically around the former—plus an onboard headphone amp. BJR was impressed with the Nomad’s apparent durability and the plug-and-play ease with which it went from carton to system, with no painstaking adjustments required. Even more impressive was the player’s performance: BJR praised the Nomad’s “rich, voluptuous, uncolored midrange,” and heard “superb” transient articulation and “an impressive amount of inner detail for so inexpensive an analog rig.” One comparison test prompted BJR to declare: “that VPI’s phono stage held its own against a \$500 phono stage designed by one of the industry’s top electronics designers is pretty impressive, given that the VPI’s stage is included as part of a turntable package costing only \$995.” A word of caution regarding the Nomad’s headphone amp: “It had much more gain than most pairs of headphones need. I found it all too easy to overdrive my ‘phones.” (Vol.38 No.2 WWW)

VPI SCOUT JR.: \$1600 WITH TONEARM AND CARTRIDGE

“The Scout Jr. record player offers, at a reasonable price, the ability to play now.” Thus spoke HR of the US-made belt-drive Scout Jr., a relatively basic turntable that comes bundled with a gimbal-bearing tonearm of stainless steel and an Ortofon 2M Red moving-magnet cartridge. Junior’s 1.25"-thick MDF plinth is reinforced with steel, and its 1"-thick platter is machined from aluminum. An outboard motor topped with a plastic pulley snugs into a recess on the plinth’s left side. From the start—and it was an easy start, since the Scout Jr. is shipped with its cartridge installed and aligned—HR was impressed that the VPI squeezed from the budget Ortofon 2M Red far better sound than he’d ever heard. As the days went by, he came to appreciate the VPI’s “American organic-ness,” and the manner in which its “slight darkness and seductively

quiet spaciousness” set it apart from other players in this price range. Quoth HR: “It made LP playback seem less mechanical and more sophisticated.” NB: The Scout Jr. is easily upgradable—for a price, the buyer can select from a choice of better tonearms, bigger platters, more effective isolation feet, and myriad phono cartridges—and replaces the VPI Traveler, which was not. (Vol.39 No.2 WWW)

D

REGA RP1: \$475 \$\$\$ ★

The plug’n’play RP1 (for Rega Planar One) replaces Rega’s popular P1. Nearly identical to the earlier model in size and shape, the RP1 uses an Ortofon OM5e moving-magnet cartridge, but trades the P1’s MDF platter for one of phenolic resin and adds Rega’s new, solidly built RB101 tonearm. Additionally, the P1’s drab gray finish is exchanged for the RP1’s choice of White, Cool Gray, or Titanium. Compared to the P1, the RP1 delivered more drive, better focus, and was the more confident, purposeful, and authoritative player. “Rega’s RP1 looks good, is easy to set up, and plays records like it means it,” said SM. AD shared SM’s enthusiasm: “It’s not just that I can’t imagine \$445 buying more happiness; I can’t imagine so modest an investment in money and effort buying more music.” The RP1 Performance Pack Upgrade was easy to install and resulted in a bigger soundstage, deeper silences, and greater resolution of low-level detail, said SM. “A no-brainer,” agreed AD. (Vol.34 Nos. 2, 4, & 5 WWW)

K

TECHNICS SL-1000R.

DELETIONS

Acoustic Signature Triple X no longer available.

TONEARMS

A

ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE TA-9000: \$19,997

The key to the TA-9000’s performance—and its remarkable price—is an armtube design in which concentric structures of aluminum alloy are joined by a very complex spiral arrangement of more than 700 connecting limbs. The pivoted TA-9000 also offers high-precision, hand-adjusted ball bearings, an SME-compatible mount, and a headshell that’s adjustable for azimuth in the usual manner (loosen clamp, rotate headshell, tighten clamp), though MF was disappointed that this expensive tonearm offers no more than a “rudimentary” height adjustment. Used with Acoustic Signature’s Ascona Mk.2 turntable, the 9" TA-9000 (it’s also available in a 12" version) presented MF with “a smooth sound with a rich midrange, great detail, and great resolution,” though it wasn’t the last word in bottom-end extension and control. MF also opined that “the arm’s mass is too low to work well with modern, low-compliance MC cartridges.” Subsequent to his review, the TA-9000 was improved: the internal structure of the once-lively armtube was redesigned, the bearing housing was made more rigid, the aluminum headshell was replaced with one machined from titanium, and the arm pillar is now raised and lowered with what MF describes as “an ingenious gear system.” MF reports better measured behavior from the TA-9000, with resonances “visibly and audibly” within the ideal window of 8–12Hz. Acoustic Signature offers these upgrades without charge to owners of the original TA-9000. (Vol.39 No.12, Vol.40 No.7)

AMG 9W2: \$3500 ★

The German-made 9W2 tonearm from turntable specialists AMG combines a traditional horizontal bearing with a vertical bearing that is, according to AD, unique in its field: “an upright pair of 0.4mm spring-steel wires that are perfectly straight when the tonearm tube is balanced, yet flex in tandem and yield to the armtube’s mass when the counterweight is moved closer to the twin fulcrums.” The result, he reports, is a near-ideal combination of zero play and absence of friction. VTA and azimuth are easily adjusted, and a magnetic antiskating mechanism